BRUVVER JIM'S BABY

By PHILIP VERRILL MIGHELS

A corking good Western story

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BY

PHILIP VERRILL MIGHELS

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This Volume is
Dedicated, with much affection, to
My Mother

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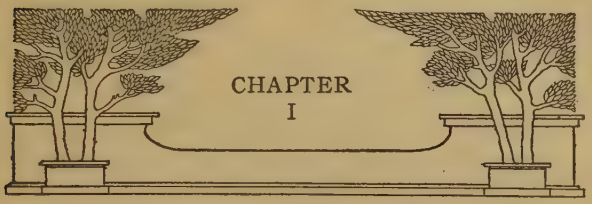
BRUVVER JIM'S BABY



A MIGHTY LITTLE HUNTER

IT all commenced that bright November day of the Indian rabbit drive and hunt. The motley army of the Piute tribe was sweeping tremendously across a sage-brush valley of Nevada, their force two hundred braves in number. They marched abreast, some thirty yards apart, and formed a line that was more than two miles long.

The spectacle presented was wonderful to see. Red, yellow, and indigo in their blankets and trappings, the hunters dotted out a line of color as far as sight could reach. Through the knee-high brush they swept ahead like a firing-line of battle, their guns incessantly booming, their advance never halted, their purpose as grim and in-

exorable as fate itself. Indeed, Death, the Reaper, multiplied two-hundred-fold and mowing a swath of incredible proportions, could scarcely have pillaged the land of its conies more thoroughly.

Before the on-press of the two-mile wall of red men with their smoking weapons, the panic-stricken rabbits scurried helplessly. Soon or late they must double back to their burrows, soon or late they must therefore die.

Behind the army, fully twenty Indian ponies, ridden by the youngster-braves of the cavalcade, were bearing great white burdens of the slaughtered hares.

The glint of gun-barrels, shining in the sun, flung back the light, from end to end of the undulating column. Billows of smoke, out-puffing unexpectedly, anywhere and everywhere along the line, marked down the tragedies where desperate bunnies, scudding from cover and racing up or down before the red men, were targets for fiercely biting hail of lead from two or three or more of the guns at once.

And nearly as frightened as the helpless creatures of the brush was a tiny little pony-rider, back of the army, mounted on a plodding horse that was all but hidden by its load of furry game. He was riding double, this odd little bit of a youngster, with a sturdy Indian boy who was on in front. That such a timid little dot of manhood should have been permitted to join the hunt was a wonder. He was apparently not more than three years old at the most. With funny little trousers that reached to his heels, with big brown eyes all eloquent of doubt, and with round, little, copper-colored cheeks, impinged upon by an old fur cap he wore, pulled down over forehead and ears, he appeared about as quaint a little man as one could readily discover.

But he seemed distressed. And how he did hang on! The rabbits secured upon the pony were crowding him backward most alarmingly. At first he had clung to the back of his fellow-rider's shirt with all the might and main of his tiny hands. As the burden of the rabbits had increased, how-

ever, the Indian hunters had piled them in between the timid little scamp and his sturdier companion, till now he was almost out on the horse's tail. His alarm had, therefore, become overwhelming. No fondness for the nice warm fur of the bunnies, no faith in the larger boy in front, could suffice to drive from his tiny face the look of woe unutterable, expressed by his eyes and his trembling little mouth.

The Indians, marching steadily onward, had come to the mountain that bounded the plain. Already a score were across the road that led to the mining-camp of Borealis, and were swarming up the sandy slope to complete the mighty swing of the army, deploying anew to sweep far westward through the farther half of the valley, and so at length backward whence they came.

The tiny chap of a game-bearer, gripping the long, velvet ears of one of the jack-rabbits tied to his horse, felt a horrid new sensation of sliding backward when the pony began to follow the hunters up the hill. Not only did the animal's rump seem to sink be-

neath him as they took the slope, but perspiration had made it amazingly smooth and insecure.

The big fat rabbits rolled against the desperate little man in a ponderous heap. The feet of one fell plump in his face, and seemed to kick, with the motion of the horse. Then a buckskin thong abruptly snapped in twain, somewhere deep in the bundle, and instantly the ears to which the tiny man was clinging, together with the head and body of that particular rabbit, and those of several others as well, parted company with the pony. Gracefully they slid across the tail of the much-relieved creature, and, pushing the tiny rider from his seat, they landed with him plump upon the earth, and were left behind.

Unhurt, but nearly buried by the four or five rabbits thus pulled from the load by his sudden descent from his perch, the dazed little fellow sat up in the sand and solemnly noted the rapid departure of the Indian army—pony, companion, and all.

Not only had his fall been unobserved by the marching braves, but the boy with whom

he had just been riding was blissfully unaware of the fact that something behind had dismounted. The whole vast line of Piute braves pressed swiftly on. The shots boomed and clattered, as the hill-sides were startled by the echoes. Red, yellow, indigo—the blankets and trappings were momentarily growing less and less distinct.

More distant became the firing. Onward, ever onward, swung the great, long column of the hunters. Dully, then even faintly, came the noise of the guns.

At last the firing could be heard no more. The two hundred warriors, the ponies, the boys that rode—all were gone. Even the rabbits, that an hour before had scampered here and there in the brush with their furry feet, would never again go pattering through the sand. The sun shone warmly down. The great world of valley and mountains, gray, severe, unpeopled, was profoundly still, in that wonderful way of the dying year, when even the crickets and locusts have ceased to sing.

Clinging in silence to the long, soft ears of

his motionless bunny, the timid little game-bearer sat there alone, big-eyed and dumb with wonder and childish alarm. He could see not far, unless it might be up the hill, for the sage-brush grew above his head and circumscribed his view. Miles and miles away, however, the mountains, in majesty of rock and snow, were sharply lifting upward into blue so deep and cloudless that its intimate proximity to the infinite was impressively manifest. The day was sweet of the ripeness of the year, and virginal as all that mighty land itself.

With two of the rabbits across his lap, the tiny hunter made no effort to rise. It was certainly secure to be sitting here in the sand, for at least a fellow could fall no farther, and the good, big mountain was not so impetuous or nervous as the pony.

An hour went by and the mere little mite of a man had scarcely moved. The sun was slanting towards the southwest corner of the universe. A flock of geese, in a great changing V, flew slowly over the valley, their wings beating gold from the sunlight, their honk!

honk! honk! the note of the end of the year.

How soon they were gone! Then indeed all the earth was abandoned to the quiet little youngster and his still more quiet company of rabbits. There was no particular reason for moving. Where should he go, and how could he go, did he wish to leave? To carry his bunny would be quite beyond his strength; to leave him here would be equally beyond his courage.

But the sun was edging swiftly towards its hiding place; the frost of the mountain air was quietly sharpening its teeth. Already the long, gray shadow of the sage-brush fell like a cooling film across the little fellow's form and face.

Homeless, unmissed, and deserted, the tiny man could do nothing but sit there and wait. The day would go, the twilight come, and the night descend—the night with its darkness, its whispered mysteries, its wailing coyotes, cruising in solitary melancholy hither and thither in their search for food.

But the sun was still wheeling, like a brazen

disk, on the rim of the hills, when something occurred. A tall, lanky man, something over forty years of age, as thin as a hammer and dusty as the road itself—a man with a beard and a long, gray, drooping mustache, and with drooping clothes—a man selected by shiftlessness to be its sign and mark—a miner in boots and overalls and great slouch hat—came tramping down a trail of the mountain. He was holding in his dusty arms a yellowish pup, that squirmed and wriggled and tried to lap his face, and comported himself in pup-wise antics, till his master was presently obliged to put him down in self-defence.

The pup knew his duty, as to racing about, bumping into bushes, snorting in places where game might abide, and thumping everything he touched with his super-active tail. Almost immediately he scented mysteries in plenty, for Indian ponies and hunters had left a fine, large assortment of trails in the sand, that no wise pup could consent to ignore.

With yelps of gladness and appreciation,

the pup went awkwardly knocking through the brush, and presently halted — bracing abruptly with his clumsy paws—amazed and confounded by the sight of a frightened little red-man, sitting with his rabbits in the sand.

For a second the dog was voiceless. Then he let out a bark that made things jump, especially the tiny man and himself.

"Here, come here, Tintoretto," drawlingly called the man from the trail. "Come back here, you young tenderfoot."

But Tintoretto answered that he wouldn't. He also said, in the language of puppy barks, that important discoveries demanded not only his but his master's attention where he was, forthwith.

There was nothing else for it; the mountain was obliged to come to Mohammed—or the man to the pup. Then the miner, no less than Tintoretto, was astonished.

To ward off the barking, the red little hunter had raised his arm across his face, but his big brown eyes were visible above his hand, and their childish seriousness appealed to the man at once.

"Well, cut my diamonds if it ain't a kid!" drawled he. "Injun pappoose, or I'm an elk! Young feller, where'd you come from, hey? What in mischief do you think you're doin' here?"

The tiny "Injun" made no reply. Tintoretto tried some puppy addresses. He gave a little growl of friendship, and, clambering over rabbits and all, began to lick the helpless child on the face and hands with unmistakable cordiality. One of the rabbits fell and rolled over. Tintoretto bounded backward in consternation, only to gather his courage almost instantly upon him and bark with lusty defiance.

"Shut up, you anermated disturbance," commanded his owner, mildly. "You're enough to scare the hair off an elephant," and, squatting in front of the wondering child, he looked at him pleasantly. "What you up to, young feller, sittin' here by yourself?" he inquired. "Scared? Needn't be scared of brother Jim, I reckon. Say, you 'ain't been left here for good? I saw the gang of Injuns, clean across the country,

from up on the ridge. It must be the last of their drives. That it? And you got left?"

The little chap looked up at him seriously and winked his big, brown eyes, but he shut his tiny mouth perhaps a trifle tighter than before. As a matter of fact, the miner expected some such stoical silence.

The pup, for his part, was making advances of friendship towards the motionless rabbits.

"Wal, say, Piute," added Jim, after scanning the country with his kindly eyes, "I reckon you'd better go home with me to Borealis. The Injuns wouldn't look to find you now, and you can't go on settin' here a waitin' for pudding and gravy to pass up the road for dinner. What do you say? Want to come with me and ride on the outside seat to Borealis?"

Considerably to the man's amazement the youngster nodded a timid affirmative.

"By honky, Tintoretto, I'll bet he savvies English as well as you," said Jim. "All right, Borealis or bust! I reckon a man who travels twenty miles to git him a pup, and

comes back home with you and this here young Piute, is as good as elected to office. Injun, what's your name?"

The tiny man apparently had nothing to impart by way of an answer.

"'Ain't got any, maybe," commented Jim. "What's the matter with me namin' you, hey? Suppose I call you Aborigineezer? All in favor, ay! Contrary minded? Carried unanimously and the motion prevails."

The child, for some unaccountable reason, seemed appalled.

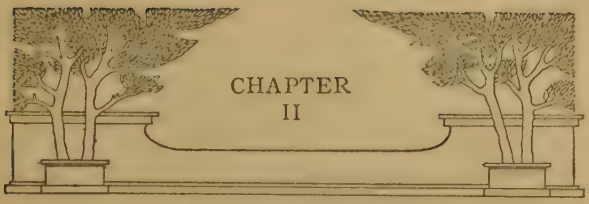
"We can't freight all them rabbits," decided the miner. "And, Tintoretto, you are way-billed to do some walkin'."

He took up the child, who continued to cling to the ears of his one particular hare As all the jacks were tied together, all were lifted and were dangling down against the miner's legs.

"Huh! you can tell what some people want by the way they hang right on," said Jim. "Wal, no harm in lettin' you stick to one. We can eat him for dinner to-morrow, I guess, and save his hide in the bargain."

He therefore cut the buckskin thong and all but one of the rabbits fell to the earth, on top of Tintoretto, who thought he was climbed upon by half a dozen bears. He let out a yowp that scared himself half into fits, and, scooting from under the danger, turned about and flung a fearful challenge of barking at the prostrate enemy.

"Come on, unlettered ignoramus," said his master, and, holding the wondering little foundling on his arm, with his rabbit still clutched by the ears, he proceeded down to the roadway, scored like a narrow gray streak through the brush, and plodded onward towards the mining-camp of Borealis.



JIM MAKES DISCOVERIES

IT was dark and there were five miles of boot-tracks and seven miles of pup-tracks left in the sand of the road when Jim, Tintoretto, and Aborigineezer came at length to a point above the small constellation of lights that marked the spot where threescore of men had builded a town.

From the top of the ridge they had climbed, the man and the pup alone looked down on the camp, for the weary little "Injun" had fallen asleep. Had he been awake, the all to be seen would have been of little promise. Great, sombre mountains towered darkly up on every side, roofed over by an arch of sky amazingly brilliant with stars. Below, the darkness was the denser for the

depth of the hollow in the hills. Vaguely the one straight street of Borealis was indicated by the lamps, like a thin Milky Way in a meagre universe of lesser lights, dimly glowing and sparsely scattered on the rock-strewn acclivities.

From down there came the sounds of life. Half-muffled music, raucous singing, blows of a hammer, yelpings of a dog, hissing of steam escaping somewhere from a boiler—all these and many other disturbances of the night furnished a microcosmic medley of the toiling, playing, hoping, and fearing, where men abide, creating that frailest and yet most enduring of frailties—a human community.

The sight of his town could furnish no novelties to the miner on top of the final rise, and feeling somewhat tired by the weight of his small companion, as well as hungry from his walking, old Jim skirted the rocky slope as best he might, and so came at length to an isolated cabin.

This dark little house was built in the brush, quite up on the hill above the town,

and not far away from a shallow ravine where a trickle of water from a spring had encouraged a straggling growth of willows, alders, and scrub. Some four or five acres of hill-side about the place constituted the "Babylonian Glory" mining-claim, which Jim accounted his, and which had seen about as much of his labor as might be developed by digging for gold in a barrel.

"Nobody home," said the owner to his dog, as he came to the door and shouldered it open. "Wal, all the more for us."

That any one might have been at home in the place was accounted for simply by the fact that certain worthies, playing in and out of luck, as the wheel of fate might turn them down or up, sometimes lived with Jim for a month at a time, and sometimes left him in solitude for weeks. One such transient partner he had left at the cabin when he started off to get the pup now tagging at his heels. This house-partner, having departed, might and might not return, either now, a week from now, or ever.

The miner felt his way across the one

big room which the shack afforded, and came to a series of bunks, built like a pantry against the wall. Into one of these he rolled his tiny foundling, after which he lighted a candle that stood in a bottle, and revealed the smoky interior of the place.

Three more of the bunks were built in the eastern end of the room; a fireplace occupied a portion of the wall against the hill; a table stood in the centre of the floor, and a number of mining tools littered a corner. Cooking utensils were strewn on the table liberally, while others hung against the wall or depended from hooks in the chimney. This was practically all there was, but the place was home.

Tintoretto, beholding his master preparing a fire to heat up some food, delved at once into everything and every place where a wet little nose could be thrust. Having snorted in the dusty corners, he trotted to the bench whereon the water-bucket stood, and, standing on his hind legs, gratefully lapped up a drink from the pail. His thirst appeased, he clambered ambitiously into one of the bunks,

discovered a nice pair of boots, and, dragging one out on the floor, proceeded to carry it under the table and to chew it as heartily as possible.

There was presently savory smoke, sufficient for an army, in the place, while sounds of things sizzling made music for the hungry. The miner laid bare a section of the table, which he set with cups, plates, and iron tools for eating. He then dished up two huge supplies of steaming beans and bacon, two monster cups of coffee, black as tar, and cut a giant pile of dun-colored bread.

"Aborigineezer," he said, "the banquet waits."

Thereupon he fetched his weary little guest to the board and attempted to seat him on a stool. The tiny man tried to open his eyes, but the effort failed. Had he been awake and sitting erect on the seat provided for his use, his head could hardly have come to the level of the supper.

"Can't you come to, long enough to eat?" inquired the much-concerned miner. "No? Wal, that's too bad. Couldn't drink the

coffee or go the beans? H'm, I guess I can't take you down to show you off to the boys to-night. You'll have to git to your downy couch." He returned the slumbering child to the bunk, where he tucked him into the blankets.

Tintoretto did ample justice to the meal, however, and filled in so thoroughly that his round little pod of a stomach was a burden to carry. He therefore dropped himself down on the floor, breathed out a sigh of contentment, and shut his two bright eyes.

Old Jim concluded a feast that made those steaming heaps of food diminish to the point of vanishing. He sat there afterwards, leaning his grizzled head upon his hand and looking towards the bunk where the tiny little chap he had found was peacefully sleeping. The fire burned low in the chimney; the candle sank down in its socket. On the floor the pup was twitching in his dreams. Outside the peace, too vast to be ruffled by puny man, had settled on all that tremendous expanse of mountains.

When his candle was about to expire the

miner deliberately prepared himself for bed, and crawled in the bunk with his tiny guest, where he slept like the pup and the child, so soundly that nothing could suffice to disturb his dreams.

The arrows of the sun itself, flung from the ridge of the opposite hills, alone dispelled the slumbers in the cabin.

The hardy old Jim arose from his blankets, and presently flung the door wide open.

"Come in," he said to the day. "Come in."

The pup awoke, and, running out, barked in a crazy way of gladness. His master washed his face and hands at a basin just outside the door, and soon had breakfast piping hot.

By then it was time to look to Aborigineezer. To Jim's delight the little man was wide awake and looking at him gravely from the blankets, his funny old cap still in place on his head, pulled down over his ears.

"Time to wash for breakfast," announced the miner. "But I don't guarantee the washin' will be the kind that mother used to

give," and taking his tiny foundling in his arms he carried him out to the basin by the door.

For a moment he looked in doubt at the only apology for a wash-rag the shanty afforded.

"Wal, it's an awful dirty cloth that you can't put a little more blackness on, I reckon," he drawled, and dipping it into the water he rubbed it vigorously across the gasping little fellow's face.

Then, indeed, the man was astounded. A wide streak, white as milk, had appeared on the baby countenance.

"Pierce my pearls!" exclaimed the miner, "if ever I saw a rag in my shack before that would leave a white mark on anything! Say!" And he took off the youngster's old fur cap.

He was speechless for a moment, for the little fellow's hair was as brown as a nut.

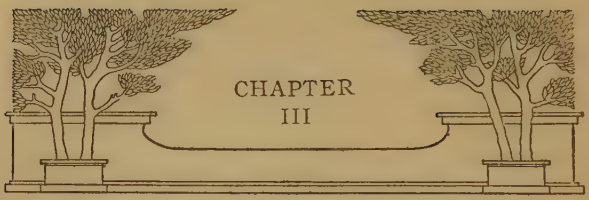
"I snum!" said Jim, wiping the wondering little face in a sort of fever of discovery and taking off color at every daub with the rag. "White kid—painted! Ain't an Injun by a thousand miles!"

And this was the truth. A timid little paleface, fair as dawn itself, but smeared with color that was coming away in blotches, emerged from the process of washing and gazed with his big, brown eyes at his foster-parent, in a way that made the miner weak with surprise. Such a pretty and wistful little armful of a boy he was certain had never been seen before in all the world.

"I snum! I certainly snum!" he said again. "I'll have to take you right straight down to the boys!"

At this the little fellow looked at him appealingly. His lip began to tremble.

"No-body—wants—me," he said, in baby accents, "no-body—wants—me—anywhere."



THE WAY TO MAKE A DOLL

FOR a moment after the quaint little pilgrim had spoken, the miner stared at him almost in awe. Had a gold nugget dropped at his feet from the sky his amazement could scarcely have been greater.

"What's that?" he said. "Nobody wants you, little boy? What's the matter with me and the pup?" And taking the tiny chap up in his arms he sat in the doorway and held him snugly to his rough, old heart and rocked back and forth, in a tumult of feeling that nothing could express.

"Little pard," he said, "you bet me and Tintoretto want you, right here."

For his part, Tintoretto thumped the house and the step and the miner's shins with the

clumsy tail that was wagging his whole puppy body. Then he clambered up and pushed his awkward paws in the little youngster's face, and licked his ear and otherwise overwhelmed him with attentions, till his master pushed him off. At this he growled and began to chew the big, rough hand that suppressed his demonstrations.

In lieu of the ears of the rabbit to which he had clung throughout the night, the silent little man on the miner's knee was holding now to Jim's enormous fist, which he found conveniently supplied. He said nothing more, and for quite a time old Jim was content to watch his baby face.

"A white little kid—that nobody wants —but me and Tintoretto," he mused, aloud, but to himself. "Where did you come from, pardner, anyhow?"

The tiny foundling made no reply. He simply looked at the thin, kindly face of his big protector in his quaint, baby way, but kept his solemn little mouth peculiarly closed.

The miner tried a score of questions, ten-

derly, coaxingly, but never a thing save that confident clinging to his hand and a nod or a shake of the head resulted.

By some means, quite his own, the man appeared to realize that the grave little fellow had never prattled as children usually do, and that what he had said had been spoken with difficulties, only overcome by stress of emotion. The mystery of whence a bit of a boy so tiny could have come, and who he was, especially after his baby statement that nobody wanted him, anywhere, remained unbroken, after all the miner's queries. Jim was at length obliged to give it up.

"Do you like that little dog?" he said, as Tintoretto renewed his overtures of companionship. "Do you like old brother Jim and the pup?"

Solemnly the little pilgrim nodded.

"Want some breakfast, all pretty, in our own little house?"

Once more the quaint and grave little nod was forthcoming.

"All right. We'll have it bustin' hot in

the shake of a crockery animal's tail," announced the miner.

He carried the mite of a man inside and placed him again in the bunk, where the little fellow found his rabbit and drew it into his arms.

The banquet proved to be a repetition of the supper of the night before, except that two great flapjacks were added to the menu, greased with fat from the bacon and sprinkled a half-inch thick with soft brown sugar.

When the cook fetched his hungry little guest to the board the rabbit came as well.

"You ought to have a dolly," decided Jim, with a knowing nod. "If only I had the ingenuity I could make one, sure," and throughout the meal he was planning the manufacture of something that should beat the whole wide world for cleverness.

The result of his cogitation was that he took no time for washing the dishes after breakfast, but went to work at once to make a doll. The initial step was to take the hide from the rabbit. Sadly but unresistingly the little pilgrim resigned his pet, and

never expected again to possess the comfort of its fur against his face.

With the skin presently rolled up in a nice light form, however, the miner was back in the cabin, looking for something of which to fashion a body and head for the lady-to-be. There seemed to be nothing handy, till he thought of a peeled potato for the lady's head and a big metal powder-flask to supply the body.

Unfortunately, as potatoes were costly, the only tuber they had in the house was a weazened old thing that parted with its wrinkled skin reluctantly and was not very white when partially peeled. However, Jim pared off enough of its surface on which to make a countenance, and left the darker hide above to form the dolly's hair. He bored two eyes, a nose, and a mouth in the toughened substance, and blackened them vividly with soot from the chimney. After this he bored a larger hole, beneath the chin, and pushed the head thus created upon the metal spout of the flask, where it certainly stuck with firmness.

With a bit of cord the skin of the rabbit was now secured about the neck and body of the lady's form, and her beauty was complete. That certain particles of powder rattled lightly about in her graceful interior only served to render her manners more animated and her person more like good, lively company, for Jim so decided himself.

"There you are. That's the prettiest dolly you ever saw anywhere," said he, as he handed it over to the willing little chap. "And she all belongs to you."

The mite of a boy took her hungrily to his arms, and Jim was peculiarly affected.

"Do you want to give her a name?" he said.

Slowly the quaint little pilgrim shook his head.

"Have you got a name?" the miner inquired, as he had a dozen times before.

This time a timid nod was forthcoming.

"Oh," said Jim, in suppressed delight. "What is your nice little name?"

For a moment coyness overtook the tiny man. Then he faintly replied, "Nu-thans."

"Nuisance?" repeated the miner, and again he saw the timid little nod.

"But that ain't a name," said Jim. "Is 'Nuisance' all the name the baby's got?"

His bit of a guest seemed to think very hard, but at last he nodded as before.

"Well, string my pearls," said the miner to himself, "if somebody 'ain't been mean and low!" He added, cheerfully, "Wal, it's easier to live down a poor name than it is to live up to a fine one, any day, but we'll name you somethin' else, I reckon, right away. And ain't that dolly nice?"

The two were in the midst of appreciating the charms of her ladyship when the cabin door was abruptly opened and in came a coatless, fat, little, red-headed man, puffing like a bellows and pulling down his shirt-sleeves with a great expenditure of energy, only to have them immediately crawl back to his elbows.

"Hullo, Keno," drawled the lanky Jim. "I thought you was mad and gone away and died."

"Me? Not me!" puffed the visitor.

"What's that?" and he nodded himself nearly off his balance towards the tiny guest he saw upon a stool.

With a somewhat belated bark, Tintoretto suddenly came out from his boot-chewing contest underneath the table and gave the new-comer an apoplectic start.

"Hey!" he cried. "Hey! By jinks! a whole menajry!"

"That's the pup," said Jim. "And, Keno, here's a poor little skeezucks that I found a-sittin' in the brush, 'way over to Coyote Valley. I fetched him home last night, and I was just about to take him down to camp and show him to the boys."

"By jinks!" said Keno. "Alive!"

"Alive and smart as mustard," said the suddenly proud possessor of a genuine surprise. "You bet he's smart! I've often noticed how there never yet was any other kind of a baby. That's one consolation left to every fool man livin'—he was once the smartest baby in the world."

"Alive!" repeated Keno, as before. "I'm goin' right down and tell the camp!"

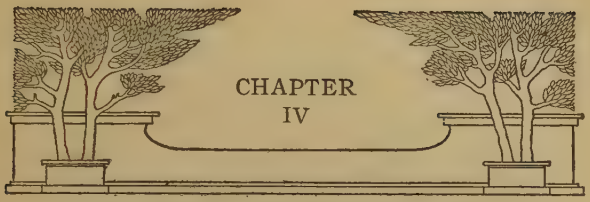
He bolted out at the door like a shot, and ran down the hill to Borealis with all his might.

Aware that the news would be spread like a sprinkle of rain, the lanky Jim put on his hat with a certain jaunty air of importance, and taking the grave little man on his arm, with the new-made doll and the pup for company, he followed, where Keno had just disappeared from view, down the slope.

A moment later the town was in sight, and groups of flannel-shirted, dusty-booted, slouchily attired citizens were discernible coming out of buildings everywhere.

Running up the hill again, puffing with added explosiveness, Keno could hardly contain his excitement.

"I've told em!" he panted. "They know he's alive and smart as mustard!"



CHAPTER IV

PLANNING A NEW CELEBRATION

THE cream, as it were, of the population of the mining-camp were ready to receive the group from up on the hill. There were nearly twenty men in the delegation, representing every shade of inelegance. Indeed, they demonstrated beyond all argument that the ways of looking rough and unkempt are infinite. There were tall and short who were rough, bearded and shaved who were rougher, and washed and unwashed who were roughest. And there were still many denizens of Borealis not then on exhibition.

Webber, the blacksmith; Lufkins, the teamster; Bone, the "barkeep"; Dunn, the carpenter, and Field, who had first discovered precious ore at Borealis, and sold

out his claims for a gold watch and chain—which subsequently proved to be brass—all these and many another shining light of the camp could be counted in the modest assemblage gathered together to have a look at the "kid" just reported by Keno.

Surprise had been laid on double, in the town, by the news of what had occurred. In the first place, it was almost incredible that old "If-only" Jim had actually made his long-threatened pilgrimage to fetch his promised pup, but to have him back here, not only with the dog in question, but also with a tiny youngster found at the edge of the wilderness, was far too much to comprehend.

In a single bound, old Jim had been elevated to a starry firmament of importance, from wellnigh the lowest position of insignificance in the camp, attained by his general worthlessness and shiftlessness—of mind and demeanor — which qualities had passed into a proverb of the place. Procrastination, like a cuckoo, had made its nest in his pockets, where the hands of Jim would hatch its

progeny. Labor and he abhorred each other mightily. He had never been known to strike a lick of work till larder and stomach were both of them empty and credit had taken to the hills. He drawled in his speech till the opening parts of the good resolutions he frequently uttered were old and forgotten before the remainders were spoken. He loitered in his walk, said the boys, till he clean forgot whether he was going up hill or down. "Hurry," he had always said, by way of a motto, "is an awful waste of time that a feller could go easy in."

Yet in his shambling, easy-going way, old Jim had drifted into nearly every heart in the camp. His townsmen knew he had once had a good education, for outcroppings thereof jutted from his personality even as his cheek-bones jutted out of his russet old countenance.

Not by any means consenting to permit old Jim to understand how astonishment was oozing from their every pore, the men brought forth by Keno's news could not, however, entirely mask their incredulity and

interest. As Jim came deliberately down the trail, with the pale little foundling on his arm, he was greeted with every possible term of familiarity, to all of which he drawled a response in kind.

Not a few in the group of citizens pulled off their hats at the nearer approach of the child, then somewhat sheepishly put them on again. With stoical resolutions almost immediately upset, they gathered closely in about the miner and his tiny companion, crowding the red-headed Keno away from his place of honor next to the child.

The quaint little pilgrim, in his old, fur cap and long, "man's" trousers, looked at the men in a grave way of doubt and questioning.

"It's a sure enough kid, all the same," said one of the men, as if he had previously entertained some doubts of the matter. "And ain't he white!"

"Of course a white kid's white," answered the barkeep, scornfully.

"Awful cute little shaver," said another. "By cracky, Jim, you must have had him

up yer sleeve for a week! He don't look more'n about one week old."

"Aw, listen to the man afraid to know anything about anything!" broke in the blacksmith. "One week! He's four or five months, or I'm a woodchuck."

"You kin tell by his teeth," suggested a leathery individual, stroking his bony jaw knowingly. "I used to be up on the game myself, but I'm a little out of practice jest at present."

"Shut up, you scare him, Shaky," admonished the teamster. "He's a pretty little chipmunk. Jim, wherever did you git him?"

Jim explained every detail of his trip to fetch the pup, stretching out his story of finding the child and bringing him hither, with pride in every item of his wonderful performance. His audience listened with profound attention, broken only by an occasional exclamation.

"Old If-only Jim! Old son-of-a-sea-cook!" repeated one, time after time.

Meanwhile the silent little man himself was

clinging to the miner's flannel collar with all his baby strength. With shy little glances he scanned the members of the group, and held the tighter to the one safe anchorage in which he seemed to feel a confidence. A number of the rough men furtively attempted a bit of coquetry, to win the favor of a smile.

"You don't mean, Jim, you found him jest a-settin' right in the bresh, with them dead jack-rabbits lyin' all 'round?" insisted the carpenter.

"That's what," said Jim, and reluctantly he brought the tale to its final conclusion, adding his theory of the loss of the child by the Indians on their hunt, and bearing down hard on the one little speech that the tiny foundling had made just this morning.

The rough men were silenced by this. One by one they took off their hats again, smoothed their hair, and otherwise made themselves a trifle prettier to look upon

"Well, what you goin' to do with him, Jim?" inquired Field, after a moment.

"Oh, I'll grow him up," said Jim. "And some day I'll send him to college."

"College be hanged!" said Field. "A lot of us best men in Borealis never went to college—and we're proud of it!"

"So the little feller said nobody wanted him, did he?" asked the blacksmith. "Well, I wouldn't mind his stayin' 'round the shop. Where do you s'pose he come from first? And painted like a little Piute Injun! No wonder he's a scared little tike."

"I ain't the one which scares him," announced a man whose hair, beard, and eyes all stuck out amazingly. "If I'd 'a' found him first he'd like me same as he takes to Jim."

"Speakin' of catfish, where the little feller come from original is what gits to me," said Field, the father of Borealis, reflectively. "You see, if he's four or five months old, why he's sure undergrowed. You could drink him up in a cupful of coffee and never even cough. And bein' undergrowed, why, how could he go on a rabbit-drive along with the Injuns? I'll bet you there's somethin' mysterious about his origin."

"Huh! Don't you jump onto no little shaver's origin when you 'ain't got any too

much to speak of yourself," the blacksmith commanded. "He's as big as any little skeezucks of his size!"

"Kin he read an' write?" asked a person of thirty-six, who had "picked up" the mentioned accomplishments at the age of thirty-five.

"He's alive and smart as mustard!" put in Keno, a champion by right of prior acquaintance with the timid little man.

"Wal, that's all right, but mustard don't do no sums in 'rithmetic," said the barkeep. "I'm kind of stuck, myself, on this here pup."

Tintoretto had been busily engaged making friends in any direction most handily presented. He wound sinuously out of the barkeep's reach, however, with pup-wise discrimination. The attention of the company was momentarily directed to the small dog, who came in for not a few of the camp's outspoken compliments.

"He's mebbe all right, but he's homely as Aunt Marier comin' through the thrashin'-machine," decided the teamster.

The carpenter added: "He's so all-fired awkward he can't keep step with hisself."

"Wal, he ain't so rank in his judgment as some I could indicate," drawled Jim, prepared to defend both pup and foundling to the last extent. "At least, he never thought he was smart, abscondin' with a little free sample of a brain."

"What kind of a mongrel is he, anyway?" inquired Bone.

"Thorough - breed," replied old Jim. "There ain't nothing in him but dog."

The blacksmith was still somewhat longingly regarding the pale little man who continued to cling to the miner's collar. "What's his name?" said he.

"Tintoretto," answered Jim, still on the subject of his yellowish pup.

"Tintoretto?" said the company, and they variously attacked the appropriateness of any such a "handle."

"What fer did you ever call him that?" asked Bone.

"Wal, I thought he deserved it," Jim confessed.

"Poor little kid — that's all I've got to say," replied the compassionate blacksmith.

"That ain't the kid's name," corrected Jim, with alacrity. "That's what I call the pup."

"That's worse," said Field. "For he's a dumb critter and can't say nothing back."

"But what's the little youngster's name?" inquired the smith, once again.

"Yes, what's the little shaver's name?" echoed the teamster. "If it's as long as the pup's, why, give us only a mile or two at first, and the rest to-morrow."

"I was goin' to name him 'Aborigineezer,'" Jim admitted, somewhat sheepishly. "But he ain't no Piute Injun, so I can't."

"Hard-hearted ole sea-serpent!" ejaculated Field. "No wonder he looks like cryin'."

"Oh, he ain't goin' to cry," said the blacksmith, roughly patting the frightened little pilgrim's cheek with his great, smutty hand. "What's he got to cry about, now he's here in Borealis?"

"Well, leave him cry, if he wants to," said

the fat little Keno. "I 'ain't heard a baby cry fer six or seven years."

"Go off in a corner and cry in your pocket, and leave it come out as you want it," suggested Bone. "Jim, you said the little feller kin talk?"

"Like a greasy dictionary," said Jim, proudly.

"Well, start him off on somethin' stirrin'."

"You can't start a little youngster off a-talkin' when you want to, any more than you can start a turtle runnin' to a fire," drawled Jim, sagely.

"Then, kin he walk?" insisted the barkeep.

Jim said, "What do you s'pose he's wearin' pants for, if he couldn't?"

"Put him down and leave us see him, then."

"This ain't no place for a child to be walkin' 'round loose," objected the gray old miner. "He'll walk some other time."

"Aw, put him down," coaxed the smith. "We'd like to see a little feller walk. There's never bin no such a sight in Borealis."

"Yes, put him down!" chorused the crowd.

"We'll give him plenty of elbow-room," added Webber. "Git back there, boys, and give him a show."

As the group could be satisfied with nothing less, and Jim was aware of their softer feelings, he disengaged the tiny hand that was closed on his collar and placed his tiny charge upon his feet in the road.

How very small, indeed, he looked in his quaint little trousers and his old fur cap!

Instantly he threw the one little arm not engaged with the furry doll about the big, dusty knee of his known protector, and buried his face in the folds of the rough, blue overalls.

"Aw, poor little tike!" said one of the men. "Take him back up, Jim. Anyway, you 'ain't yet told us his name, and how kin any little shaver walk which ain't got a name?"

Jim took the mere little toy of a man again in his arms and held him close against his heart.

"He 'ain't really got any name," he con-

fessed. "If only I had the poetic vocabulary I'd give him a high-class out-and-outer."

"What's the matter with a good old home-made name like Si or Hank or Zeke?" inquired Field, who had once been known as Hank himself.

"They ain't good enough," objected Jim. "If only I can git an inspiration I'll fit him out like a barn with a bran'-new coat of paint."

"Well, s'pose—" started Keno, but what he intended to say was never concluded.

"What's the fight?" interrupted a voice, and the men shuffled aside to give room to a well-dressed, dapper-looking man. It was Parky, the gambler. He was tall, and easy of carriage, and cultivated a curving black mustache. In his scarf he wore a diamond as large as a marble. At his heels a shivering little black-and-tan dog, with legs no larger than pencils and with a skull of secondary importance to its eyes, followed him mincingly into the circle and stood beside his feet with its tail curved in under its body.

"What have you got? Huh! Nothing but a kid!" said the gambler, in supreme contempt.

"And a pup!" said Keno, aggressively.

The gambler ignored the presence of the child, especially as Tintoretto bounded clumsily forward and bowled his own shaking effigy of a canine endways in one glad burst of friendship.

The black-and-tan let out a feeble yelp. With his boot the gambler threw Tintoretto six feet away, where he landed on his feet and turned about growling and barking in puppywise questioning of this sudden manœuvre. With a few more staccato yelps, the shivering black-and-tan retreated behind the gambler's legs.

"Of all the ugly brutes I ever seen," said Parky, "that's the worst yellow flea-trap of the whole caboose."

"Wal, I don't know," drawled Jim, as he patted his timid little pilgrim on the back in a way of comfort. "All dogs look alike to a flea, and I reckon Tintoretto is as good flea-feed as the next. And, anyhow, I

wouldn't have a dog the fleas had deserted. When the fleas desert a dog, it's the same as when the rats desert a ship. About that time a dog has lost his doghood, and then he ain't no better than a man who's lost his manhood."

"Aw, I'd thump you and the cur together if you didn't have that kid on deck," sneered the gambler.

"You couldn't thump a drum," answered Jim, easily. "Come back here, Tintoretto. Don't you touch that skinny little critter with the shakes. I wouldn't let you eat no such a sugar-coated insect."

The crowd was enjoying the set - to of words immensely. They now looked to Parky for something hot. But the man of card-skill had little wit of words.

"Don't git too funny, old boy," he cautioned. "I'd just as soon have you for breakfast as not."

"I wish the fleas could say as much for you or your imitation dog," retorted Jim. "There's just three things in Borealis that go around smellin' thick of perfume, and

you and that little two-ounce package of dog - degeneration are maybe some worse than the other."

Parky made a belligerent motion, but Webber, the blacksmith, caught his arm in a powerful grip.

"Not to-day," he said. "The boys don't want no gun-play here this mornin'."

"You're a lot of old women and babies," said Parky, and pushing through the group he walked away, a certain graceful insolence in his bearing.

"Speakin' of catfish," said Field, "we ought to git up some kind of a celebration to welcome Jim's little skeezucks to the camp."

"That's the ticket," agreed Bone. "What's the matter with repeatin' the programme we had for the Fourth of July?"

"No, we want somethin' new," objected the smith. "It ought to be somethin' we never had before."

"Why not wait till Christmas and git good and ready?" said Jim.

The argument was that Christmas was something more than four weeks away.

"We've got to have a rousin' big Christmas fer little Skeezucks, anyhow," suggested Bone. "What sort of a celebration is there that we 'ain't never had in Borealis?"

"Church," said Keno, promptly.

This caused a silence for a moment.

"Guess that's so, but—who wants church?" inquired the teamster.

"We might git up somethin' worse," said a voice in the crowd.

"How?" demanded another.

"It wouldn't be so far off the mark for a little kid like him," tentatively asserted Field, the father of the camp. "S'pose we give it a shot?"

"Anything suits me," agreed the carpenter. "Church might be kind of decent, after all. Jim, what you got to say 'bout the subject?"

Jim was still patting the timid little foundling on the back with a comforting hand.

"Who'd be preacher?" said he.

They were stumped for a moment.

"Why — you," said Keno. "Didn't you find little Skeezucks?"

"Kerrect," said Bone. "Jim kin talk like a steam fire-engine squirtin' languages."

"If only I had the application," said Jim, modestly, "I might git up somethin' passable. Where could we have it?"

This was a stumper again. No building in the camp had ever been consecrated to the uses of religious worship.

Bone came to the rescue without delay.

"You kin have my saloon, and not a cent of cost," said he.

"Bully fer Bone!" said several of the men.

"Y-e-s, but would it be just the tip-toppest, tippe-bob-royal of a place?" inquired Field, a little cautiously.

"What's the matter with it?" said Bone. "When it's church it's church, and I guess it would know the way to behave! If there's anything better, trot it out."

"You can come to the shop if it suits any better," said the blacksmith. "It 'ain't got no floor of gold, and there ain't nothing like wings, exceptin' wheels, but the fire kin be kept all day to warm her up, and there's plenty of room fer all which wants to come."

"If I'm goin' to do the preachin', I'd like the shop first rate," said Jim. "What day is to-day?"

"Friday," replied the teamster.

"All right. Then we'll say on Sunday we celebrate with church in Webber's blacksmith shop," agreed old Jim, secretly delighted beyond expression. "We won't git gay with anything too high-falootin', but we'd ought to git Shorty Hobb to show up with his fiddle."

"Certain!" assented the barkeep. "You kin leave that part of the game to me."

"If we've got it all settled, I reckon I'll go back up to the shack," said Jim. "The little feller 'ain't had a chance yet to play with his doll."

"Is that a doll?" inquired the teamster, regarding the grave little pilgrim's bundle of fur in curiosity. "How does he know it's a doll?"

"He knows a good sight more than lots of older people," answered Jim. "And if only I've got the gumption I'll make him a whole slough of toys and things."

"Well, leave us say good-bye to him 'fore you go," said the blacksmith. "Does he savvy shakin' hands?"

He gave a little grip to the tiny hand that held the doll, and all the others did the same. Little Skeezucks looked at them gravely, his quaint baby face playing havoc with their rough hearts.

"Softest little fingers I ever felt," said Webber. "I'd give twenty dollars if he'd laugh at me once."

"Awful nice little shaver," said another.

"I once had a mighty touchin' story happen to me, myself," said Keno, solemnly.

"What was it?" inquired a sympathetic miner.

"Couldn't bear to tell it — not this mornin'," said Keno. "Too touchin'."

"Good-bye fer just at present, little Skeezucks," said Field, and, suddenly divesting himself of his brazen watch and chain, he offered it up as a gift, with spontaneous generosity. "Want it, Skeezucks?" said he. "Don't you want to hear it go?"

The little man would relax neither his

clutch on Jim's collar nor his hold of his doll, wherefore he had no hand with which to accept the present.

"Do you think he runs a pawn-shop, Field?" said the teamster. "Put it back."

The men all guffawed in their raucous way.

"Keeps mighty good time, all the same," said Field, and he re-swung the chain, like a hammock, from the parted wings of his vest, and dropped the huskily ticking guardian of the minutes back to its place in his pocket.

"Watches that don't keep perfect time," drawled Jim, "are scarcer than wimmin who tell their age on the square."

"Better come over, Jim, and have a drink," suggested the barkeep. "You're sure one of the movin' spirits of Borealis."

"No, I don't think I'll start the little feller off with the drinkin' example," replied the miner. "You'll often notice that the men who git the name of bein' movin' spirits is them that move a good deal of whiskey into their interior department. I reckon we'll mosey home the way we are."

"I guess I'll join you up above," said the fat little Keno, pulling stoutly at his sleeves. "You'll need me, anyway, to cut some brush fer the fire."

With tiny Skeezucks gravely looking backward at the group of men all waving their hats in a rough farewell, old Jim started proudly up the trail that led to the Babylonian Glory claim, with Tintoretto romping awkwardly at his heels.

Suddenly, Webber, the blacksmith, left the group, and ran quickly after them up the slope.

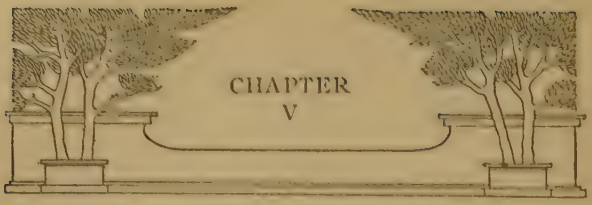
"Say, Jim," he said. "I thought, perhaps, if you reckoned little Skeezucks ought to bunk down here in town—why—I wouldn't mind if you fetched him over to the house. There's plenty of room."

"Wal, not to-day I won't," said Jim. "But thank you, Wébber, all the same."

"All right, but if you change your mind it won't be no trouble at all," and, not a little disappointed, the smith waved once more to the little pilgrim on the miner's arm and went back down the hill.

Then up spoke Keno.

"Bone and Lufkins both wanted me to tell you, Jim, if you happen to want a change fer little Skeezucks, you can fetch him down to them," he said. "But of course we ain't agoin' to let 'em have our little kid in no great shakes of a hurry."



CHAPTER V

VISITORS AT THE CABIN

WHEN Jim and his company had disappeared from view up the rock-strewn slope, the men left below remained in a group, to discuss not only the marvellous advent of a genuine youngster in Borealis, but likewise the fitness of old If-only Jim as a foster-parent.

"I wouldn't leave him raise a baby rattlesnake of mine," said Field, whose watch had not been accepted by the foundling. "In fact, there ain't but a few of us here into camp which knows the funderments of motherhood, anyhow."

"I don't mind givin' Jim a few little pointers on the racket," responded Bone. "Never knew Jim yet to chuck out my advice."

"He's too lazy to chuck it," vouchsafed the teamster. "He just lets it trickle out and drip."

"Well, we'll watch him, that's all," Field remarked, with a knowing squint in his eyes, and employing a style he would not have dared to parade in the hearing of Jim. "Borealis has come to her formaline period, and she can't afford to leave this child be raised extraneous. It's got to be done with honor and glory to the camp, even if we have to take the kid away from Jim complete."

"He found the little skeezucks, all the same," the blacksmith reminded them. "That counts for somethin'. He's got a right to keep him for a while, at least, unless the mother should heave into town."

"Or the dad," added Lufkins.

"Shoot the dad!" answered Bone. "A dad which would let a little feller small as him git lost in the brush don't deserve to git him back."

"Mysterious case, sure as lizards is insects," said an individual heretofore silent. "I guess I'll go and tell Miss Doc Dennihan."

"'Ain't Miss Doc bin told — and her the only decent woman in the camp?" inquired Field. "I'll go along and see you git it right."

"No Miss Doc in mine," said the smith. "I'll git back and blow my fire up before she's plump dead out. Fearful vinegar Miss Doc would make if ever she melted."

Miss Dennihan, sister of "Doc" Dennihan, was undeniably If-only Jim's exact antithesis — a scrupulously tidy, exacting lady, so severe in her virtues and so acrid in denunciations of the lack of down-east circumspection that nearly every man in camp shied off from her abode as he might have shied from a bath in nitric acid. Six months prior to this time she had come to Borealis from the East, unexpectedly plumping down upon her brother "Doc" with all her moral fixity of purpose, not only to his great distress of mind, but also to that of all his acquaintances as well. She had raided the ethical standing of miners, teamsters, and men-about-town; she had outwardly and inwardly condemned the loose and indeco-

rous practices of the camp; she had made herself an accusing hand, as it were, pointing out the road to perdition which all and sundry of the citizens of Boreal is, including "Doc," were travelling. If only Jim had promptly responded to her natural antipathy to all that he represented, and the strained relations between the pair had furnished much amusement for the male population of the place.

It was now to this lady that Field and his friend proposed a visit. The group of men broke up, and the news that each one had to tell of the doings of Jim was widely spread; and the wonder increased till it stretched to the farthest confines of the place. Then as fast as the miners and other laborers, who were busy with work, could get away for a time sufficiently long, they made the pilgrimage up the slope to the cabin where the tiny foundling had domicile. They found the timid little man seated, with his doll, on the floor, from which he watched them gravely, in his baby way.

Half the honors of receiving the groups

and showing off the quaint little Skeezucks were assumed by Keno, with a grace that might have been easy had he not been obliged to pull down his shirt-sleeves with such exasperating frequency.

But Jim was the hero of the hour, as he very well knew. Time after time, and ever with thrilling new detail and added incident, he recounted the story of his find, gradually robbing even Tintoretto, the pup, of such of the glory as he really had earned.

The pup, however, was recklessly indifferent. He could pile up fresh glories every minute by bowling the little pilgrim on his back and walking on his chest to lap his ear. This he proceeded to do, in his clumsy way of being friendly, with a regularity only possible to an enthusiast. And every time he did it anew, either Keno or Jim or a visitor would shy something at him and call him names. This, however, only served to incite him to livelier antics of licking everybody's face, wagging himself against the furniture, and dragging the various

bombarding missiles between the legs of all the company.

There were men, who apparently had nothing else to do, who returned to the cabin on the hill with every new visiting deputation. A series of ownership in and familiarity with the grave little chap and his story came upon them rapidly. Field, the father of Borealis, was the most assiduous guide the camp afforded. By afternoon he knew more about the child than even Jim himself.

For his part, the lanky Jim sat on a stool, looking wiser than Solomon and Moses rolled in one, and greeted his wondering acquaintances with a calm and dignity that his oneness in the great event was magnifying hourly. That such an achievement as finding a lost little pilgrim in the wilderness might be expected of his genius every day was firmly impressed upon himself, if not on all who came.

"Speakin' of catfish, Jim thinks he's hoein' some potatoes," said Field to a group of his friends. "If one of us real live spirits of

Borealis had bin in his place, it's ten to one we'd 'a' found a pair of twins."

All the remainder of the day, and even after dinner, and up to eight o'clock in the evening, the new arrivals, or the old ones over again, made the cabin on the hill their Mecca.

"Shut the door, Keno, and sit outside, and tell any more that come along, the show is over for the day," instructed Jim, at last. "The boy is goin' to bed."

"Did he bring a nightie?" said Keno.

"Forgot it, I reckon," answered Jim, as he took the tired little chap in his arms. "If only I had the enterprise I'd make him one to-night."

But it never got made. The pretty little armful of a boy went to sleep with all his baby garments on, the long "man's" trousers and all, and Jim permitted all to remain in place, for the warmth thereof, he said. Into the bunk went the tiny bundle of humanity, his doll tightly held to his breast.

Then Jim sat down and watched the bunk, till Keno had come inside and climbed in a

bed and begun a serenade. At twelve o'clock the miner was still awake. He went to his door, and, throwing it open, looked out at the great, dark mountains and the brilliant sky.

"If only I had the steam I'd open up the claim and make the little feller rich," he drawled to himself. Then he closed the door, and, removing his clothing, got into the berth where his tiny guest was sleeping, and knew no more till the morning came and a violent knocking on his window prodded his senses into something that answered for activity.

"Come in!" he called. "Come in, and don't waste all that noise."

The pup awoke and let out a bark.

In response to the miner's invitation the caller opened the door and entered. Jim and Keno had their heads thrust out of their bunks, but the two popped in abruptly at the sight of a tall female figure. She was homely, a little sharp as to features, and a little near together and piercing as to eyes. Her teeth were prominent, her mouth un-

questionably generous in dimensions, and a mole grew conspicuously upon her chin. Nevertheless, she looked, as Jim had once confessed, "remarkly human." On her head she wore a sun-bonnet. Her black alpaca dress was as styleless and as shiny as a stovepipe. It was short, moreover, and therefore permitted a view of a large, flat pair of shoes on which polish for the stovepipe aforesaid had been lavishly coated.

It was Miss Doc Dennihan. Having duly heard of the advent of a quaint little boy, found in the brush by the miner, she had come thus early in the morning to gratify a certain hunger that her nature felt for the sight of a child. But always one of the good woman's prides had been concealment of her feelings, desires, and appetites. She had formed a habit, likewise, of hiding not a few of her intentions. Instead of inquiring now for what she sought, she glanced swiftly about the interior of the cabin and said:

"Ain't you lazy-joints got up yet in this here cabin?"

"Been up and hoisted the sun and went

back to bed," drawled Jim, while Keno drew far back in his berth and fortified himself behind his blankets. "Glad to see you, but sorry you've got to be goin' again so soon."

"I 'ain't got to be goin'," corrected the visitor, with decision. "I jest thought I'd call in and see if your clothin' and kitchen truck was needin' a woman's hand. Breakfast over to our house is finished and John has went to work, and everything has bin did up complete, so 'tain't as if I was takin' the time away from John; and this here place is disgraceful dirty, as I could see with nuthin' but a store eye. Is these here overhalls your'n?"

"When I'm in 'em I reckon they are," drawled Jim, in some disquietude of mind. "But don't you touch 'em! Them pants is heirlooms. Wouldn't have anybody fool with them for a million dollars."

"They don't look worth no such a figger," said Miss Dennihan, as she held them up and scanned them with a critical eye. "They're wantin' a patch in the knee. It's lucky fer

you I toted my bag. I kin always match overhalls, new or faded."

Keno slyly ventured to put forth his head, but instantly drew it back again.

Jim, in his bunk, was beginning to sweat. He held his little foundling by the hand and piled up a barrier of blankets before them. That many another of the male residents of Borealis had been honored by similar visitations on the part of Miss Doc was quite the opposite of reassuring. That the lady generally came as a matter of curiosity, and remained in response to a passion for making things glisten with cleanliness, he had heard from a score of her victims. He knew she was here to get her eyes on the grave little chap he was cuddling from sight, but he had no intention of sharing the tiny pilgrim with any one whose attentions would, he deemed, afford a trial to the nerves.

"Seems to me the last time I saw old Doc his shirt needed stitchin' in the sleeve," he said. "How about that, Keno?"

Keno was dumb as a clam.

"You never seen nuthin' of the sort,"

corrected Miss Doc, with asperity, and, removing her bonnet, she sat down on a stool, Jim's overalls in hand and her bag in her lap. "John's mended regular, all but his hair, and if soap-suds and bear's-grease would patch his top he wouldn't be bald another day."

"He ain't exactly bald," drawled the uncomfortable miner. "His hair was parted down the middle by a stroke of lightnin'. Or maybe you combed it yourself."

"Don't you try to git comical with me!" she answered. "I didn't come here for triflin'."

Her back being turned towards the end of the room wherein the red-headed Keno was ensconced, that diffident individual furtively put forth his hand and clutched up his boots and trousers from the floor. The latter he managed to adjust as he wormed about in the berth. Then silently, stealthily, trembling with excitement, he put out his feet, and suddenly bolting for the door, with his boots in hand, let out a yell and shot from the house like a demon, the pup at his heels, loudly barking.

"Keno! Keno! come back here and stand your share!" bawled Jim, lustily, but to no avail.

"Mercy in us!" Miss Doc exclaimed. "That man must be crazy."

Jim sank back in his bunk hopelessly.

"It's only his clothes makes him look foolish," he answered. "He's saner than I am, plain as day."

"Then it's lucky I came," decided the visitor, vigorously sewing at the trousers. "The looks of this house is enough to drive any man insane. You're an ornary, shiftless pack of lazy-joints as ever I seen. Why don't you git up and cook your breakfast?"

Perspiration oozed from the modest Jim afresh.

"I never eat breakfast in the presence of ladies," said he.

"Well, you needn't mind me. I'm jest a plain, sensible woman," replied Miss Dennihan. "I don't want to see no feller-critter starve."

Jim writhed in the blankets. "I didn't s'pose you could stay all day," he ventured.

"I kin stay till I mend all your garmints and tidy up this here cabin," she announced, calmly. "So let your mind rest easy." She meant to see that child if it took till evening to do so.

"Maybe I can go to sleep again and dream I'm dead," said Jim, in growing despair.

"If you kin, and me around, you can beat brother John all to cream," she responded, smoothing out the mended overalls and laying them down on a stool. "Now you kin give me your shirt."

Jim galvanically gathered the blankets in a tightened noose about his neck.

"Hold on!" he said. "Hold on! This shirt is a bran'-new article, and you'd spoil it if you come within twenty-five yards of it with a needle."

"Where's your old one?" she demanded, atilt for something more to repair. Her gaze searched the bunks swiftly, and Jim was sure she was looking for the little man behind him. "Where's your old one went?" she repeated.

"I turned it over on a friend of mine,"

drawled Jim, who meant he had deftly reversed it on himself. "It's a poor shirt that won't work both ways."

"Ain't there nuthin' more I kin mend?" she asked.

"Not unless it's somethin' of Doc's down to your lovely little home."

"Oh, I ain't agoin' to go, if that's what you're drivin' at," she answered, as she swiftly assembled the soiled utensils of the cuisine. "I'll tidy up this here pig-pen if it takes a week, and you kin hop up and come down easy."

"I wouldn't have you go for nothing," drawled Jim, squirming with abnormal impatience to be up and doing. "Angel's visits are comin' fewer and fewer in a box every day."

"That's bogus," answered the lady. "I sense your oilin' me over. You git up and go and git a fresh pail of water."

"I'd like to," Jim said, convincingly, "but the only time I ever broke my arm was when I went out for a bucket of water before breakfast."

"You ain't agoin' is what you mean, with all them come-a-long-way-round excuses," she conjectured. "You've got the name of bein' the laziest-jointed, mos' shiftless man into camp."

"Wal," drawled the helpless miner, "a town without a horrible example is deader than the spikes in Adam's coffin. And the next best thing to being a livin' example is to hang around the house where one of 'em stays in his bunk all mornin'."

"If that's another of them underhanded hints of your'n, you might as well save your breath," she replied. "I'll go and git the water myself, fer them dishes is goin' to git cleaned."

She took up the bucket at once. Outside, the sounds of some one scooting rapidly away brought to Jim a thought of Keno's recently demonstrated presence of mind.

Cautiously sitting up in the berth, so soon as Miss Doc had disappeared with the pail, he hurriedly drew on his boots. A sound of returning footsteps came to his startled ears. He leaped back up in the bunk, boots

and all, and covered himself with the blanket, to the startlement of the timid little chap, who was sitting there to watch developments. Both drew down as Miss Doc reappeared in the door.

"I might as well tote a kettleful, too," she said, and taking that soot-plated article from its hook in the chimney she once more started for the spring.

This time, like a guilty burglar, old Jim crept out to the door. Then with one quick resolve he caught up his trousers, and snatching his pale little guest from the berth, flung a blanket about them, sneaked swiftly out of the cabin, stole around to its rear, and ran with long-legged awkwardness down through a shallow ravine to the cover of a huge heap of bowlders, where he paused to finish his toilet.

"Hoot! Hoot!" sounded furtively from somewhere near. Then Keno came ducking towards him from below, with Tintoretto in his wake, so rampantly glad in his puppy heart that he instantly climbed on the timid little Skeezucks, sitting for conven-

ience on the earth, and bowled him head over heels.

"Here, pup, you abate yourself," said Jim. "Be solemnly glad and let it go at that." And he took up the gasping little chap, whose doll was, as ever, clasped fondly to his heart.

"How'd you make it?" inquired Keno. "Has she gone for good?"

"No, she's gone for water," answered the miner, ruefully. "She's set on cleanin' up the cabin. I'll bet when she's finished we'll have to pan the gravel mighty careful to find even a color of our once happy home."

"Well, you got away, anyhow," said Keno, consolingly. "You can't have your cake and eat it too."

"No, that's the one nasty thing about cake," said Jim. He sat on a rock and addressed the wondering little pilgrim, who was watching his face with baby gravity. "Did she scare the boy?" he asked. "Is he gittin' hungry? Does pardner want some breakfast?"

The little fellow nodded.

"What would little Skeezucks like old brother Jim to make for breakfast?"

The quaint bit of a man drew a trifle closer to the rough old coat and timidly answered:

"Bwead—an'—milk."

The two men started mildly.

"By jinks!" said the awe-smitten Keno. "By jinks!—talkin'!"

"I told you so," said Jim, suppressing his excitement. "Bread and milk?" he repeated. "Just bread and milk. You poor little shaver! Wal, that's as easy as oyster stew or apple-dumplin'. Baby want anything else?"

The small boy shook a negative.

"By jinks!" said Keno, as before. "Look at him go it!"

"I'll make some bread to-day, if ever we git back into Eden," said Jim. "And I'll make him a lot of things. If only I had the stuff in me I'd make him a Noah's ark and a train of cars and a fat mince-pie. Would little Skeezucks like a train of cars?"

Again the little pilgrim shook his head.

'Then what more would the baby like?" coaxed the miner.

Again with his shy little cuddling up the wee man answered, "Moey — bwead — an'— milk."

"By jinks!" repeated the flabbergasted Keno, and he pulled at his sleeves with all his strength.

"Say, Keno," said Jim, "go find Miss Doc's goat and milk him for the boy."

"Miss Doc may be home by now," objected Keno, apprehensively.

"Well, then, sneak up and see if she has gone off real mad."

"S'posen she 'ain't?" Keno promptly hedged. "S'posen she seen me?"

"You've got all out-doors to skedaddle in, I reckon."

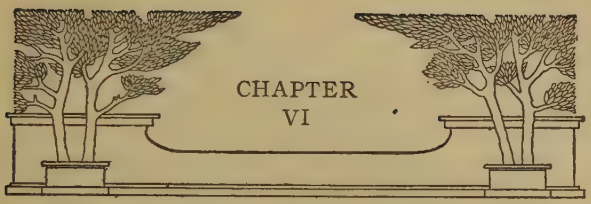
Keno, however, had many objections to any manner of venture with the wily Miss Dennihan. It took nearly half an hour of argument to get him up to the brow of the slope. Then, to his uncontainable delight, he beheld the disgusted and somewhat defeated Miss Doc more than half-way down

the trail to Borealis, and making shoe-tracks with assuring rapidity.

"Hoot! Hoot!" he called, in a cautious utterance. "She's went, and the cabin looks just the same—from here."

But Jim, when he came there, with his tiny guest upon his arm, looked long at the well-scrubbed floor and the tidy array of pots, pans, plates, and cups.

"We'll never find the salt, or nothin', for a week," he drawled. "It does take some people an awful long time to learn not to meddle with the divine order of things."



THE BELL FOR CHURCH

WHAT with telling little Skeezucks of all the things he meant to make, and fondling the grave bit of babyhood, and trying to work out the story of how he came to be utterly unsought for, deserted, and parentless, Jim had hardly more than time enough remaining, that day, in which to entertain the visiting men, who continued to climb the hill to the house.

Throughout that Saturday there was never more than fifteen minutes when some of the big, rough citizens of Borealis were not on hand, attempting always to get the solemn little foundling to answer some word to their efforts at baby conversation. But neither to them, for the strange array of presents they offered, nor to Jim himself,

for all his gentle coaxing, would the tiny chap vouchsafe the slightest hint of who he was or whence he had come.

It is doubtful if he knew. By the hour he sat where they placed him, holding his doll with something more deep and hungry than affection, and looking at Jim or the visitors in his pretty, baby way of gravity and questioning.

When he sat on old Jim's knee, however, he leaned in confidence against him, and sighed with a sweet little sound of contentment, as poignant to reinspire a certain ecstasy of sadness in the miner's breast as it was to excite an envy in the hearts of the others.

Next to Jim, he loved Tintoretto—that joyous, irresponsible bit of pup - wise gladness whose tail was so utterly inadequate to express his enthusiasm that he wagged his whole fuzzy self in the manner of an awkward fish. Never was the tiny man seated with his doll on the floor that the pup failed to pounce upon him and push him over, half a dozen times. Never did this happen

that one of the men, or Jim himself, did not at once haul Tintoretto, growling, away by the tail or the ear and restore their tiny guest to his upright position. Never did such a good Samaritan fail to raise his hand for a cuff at the pup, nor ever did one of them actually strike. It ended nearly always in the pup's attack on the hand in question, which he chewed and pawed at and otherwise befriended as only a pup, in his freedom from worries and cares, can do.

With absolutely nothing prepared, and with nothing but promises made and forgotten, old Jim beheld the glory of Sunday morning come, with the bite and crystalline sunshine of the season in the mountain air.

God's thoughts must be made in Nevada, so lofty and flawless is the azure sky, so utterly transparent is the atmosphere, so huge, gray, and passionless the mighty reach of mountains!

Man's little thought was expressed in the camp of Borealis, which appeared like a herd of small, brown houses, pitifully insignificant in all that immensity, and gather-

ed together as if for company, trustfully nestling in the hand of the earth-mother, known to be so gentle with her children. On the hill-sides, smaller mining houses stood, each one emphasized by the blue-gray heap of earth and granite—the dump—formed by the labors of the restless men who burrowed in the rock for precious metal. The road, which seemed to have no ending-place, was blazed through the brush and through the hills in either direction across the miles and miles of this land without a people. The houses of Borealis stood to right and left of this path through the wilderness, as if by common consent to let it through.

Meagre, unknown, unimportant Borealis, with her threescore men and one decent woman, shared, like the weightiest empire, in the smile, the care, the yearning of the ever All-Pitiful, greeting the earth with another perfect day.

Intelligence of what could be expected, in the way of a celebration at the blacksmith-shop of Webber, had been more than merely

spread; it had almost been flooded over town. Long before the hour of ten, scheduled by common consent for church to commence, Webber was sweeping sundry parings of horse-hoof and scraps of iron to either side of his hard earth floor, and sprinkling the dust with water that he flirted from his barrel. He likewise wiped off the anvil with his leathern apron, and making a fire in the forge to take off the chill, thrust in a huge hunk of iron to irradiate the heat

Many of the denizens of Borealis came and laid siege to the barber-shop as early as six in the morning. Hardly a man in the place, except Parky, the gambler, had been dressed in extravagance so imposing since the 4th of July as was early apparent in the street. Bright new shirts, red, blue, and even white, came proudly to the front. Trousers were dropped outside of boots, and the boots themselves were polished. A run on bear's-grease and hair-oil lent a shining halo to nearly every head the camp could boast. Then the groups began to gather near the open shop of the smith.

"We'd ought to have a bell," suggested Lufkins, the teamster. "Churches always ring the bell to let the parson know it's time he was showin' up to start the ball."

"Well, I'll string up a bar of steel," said Webber. "You can get a crackin' fine lot of noise out of that."

He strung it up in a framework just outside the door, ordinarily employed for hoisting heavy wagons from the earth. Then with a hammer he struck it sharply.

The clear, ringing tone that vibrated all through the hills was a stirring note indeed. So the bell-ringer struck his steel again.

"That ain't the way to do the job," objected Field. "That sounds like scarin' up voters at a measly political rally"

"Can you do it any better?" said the smith, and he offered his hammer.

"Here comes Doc Dennihan," interrupted the barkeep. "Ask Doc how it's done. If he don't know, we'll have to wait for old If-only Jim hisself."

The brother of the tall Miss Doc was a

small man with outstanding ears, the palest gray eyes, and the quietest of manners. He was not a doctor of anything, hence his title. Perhaps the fact that the year before he had quietly shot all six of the bullets of his Colt revolver into the body of a murderous assailant before that distinguished person could fall to the earth had invested his townsmen and admirers with a modest desire to do him a titular honor. Howsoever that might have been, he had always subsequently found himself addressed with sincere respect, while his counsel had been sought on every topic, possible, impossible, and otherwise, mooted in all Borealis. The fact that his sister was the "boss of his shack," and that he, indeed, was a henpecked man, was never, by any slip of courtesy, conversationally paraded, especially in his hearing.

Appealed to now concerning the method of ringing the bar of steel for worshipful purposes, he took a bite at his nails before replying Then he said:

"Well, I'd ring it a little bit faster than

you would for a funeral and a little bit slower than you would for a fire."

"That's the stuff!" said Field. "I knowed that Doc would know."

But Doc refused them, nevertheless, when they asked if he would deign to do the ringing himself. Consequently Field, the father of the camp, made a gallant attempt at the work, only to miss the "bell" with his hammer and strike himself on the knee, after which he limped to a seat, declaring they didn't need a bell-ringing anyhow. Upon the blacksmith the duty devolved by natural selection.

He rang a lusty summons from the steel, that fetched all the dressed-up congregation of the town hastening to the scene. Still, old Jim, the faithful Keno, little Skeezucks, and Tintoretto failed to appear. A deputation was therefore sent up the hill, where Jim was found informing his household that if only he had the celerity of action he would certainly make a Sunday suit of clothing for the tiny little man. For himself, he had washed and re-turned his shirt, combed his

hair, and put on a better pair of boots, which the pup had been chewing to occupy his leisure time.

The small but impressive procession came slowly down the trail at last, Jim in the lead, with the grave little foundling on his arm.

"Boys," said he, as at last he entered the dingy shop and sat his quaint bit of a man on the anvil, over which he had thoughtfully thrown his coat — "boys, if only I'd had about fifteen minutes more of time I'd have thought up all the tricks you ever saw in a church."

The men filed in, awkwardly taking off their hats, and began to seat themselves as best they could, on anything they found available. Webber, the smith, went stoutly at his bellows, and blew up a fire that flamed two feet above the forge, fountaining fiercely with sparks of the iron in the coal, and tossing a ruddy light to the darkest corners of the place. The incense of labor — that homely fragrance of the smithy all over the world—spread fresh and new to the very door itself. Old Jim edged closer to the anvil and

placed his hand on the somewhat frightened little foundling, sitting there so gravely, and clasping his doll in fondness to his heart.

Outside, it was noted, Field had halted the red-headed Keno for a moment's whispered conversation. Keno nodded knowingly. Then he came inside, and, addressing them all, but principally Jim, he said:

"Say, before we open up, Miss Doc would like to know if she kin come."

A silence fell on all the men. Webber went hurriedly and closed the ponderous door.

"Wal, she wouldn't be apt to like it till we get a little practised up," said the diplomatic Jim, who knew the tenor of his auditors. "Tell her maybe she kin—some other time."

"This ain't no regular elemercenary institution," added the teamster.

"Why not now?" demanded Field. "Why can't she come?"

"Becuz," said the smith, "this church ain't no place for a woman, anyhow."

A general murmur of assent came from all

the men save Field and Doc Dennihan himself.

"Leave the show commence," said a voice.

"Start her up," said another.

"Wal, now," drawled Jim, as he nervously stroked his beard, "let's take it easy. Which opening do all you fellers prefer?"

No one answered.

One man finally inquired, "How many kinds is there?"

Jim said, "Wal, there's the Methodist, the Baptist, the Græco - Roman, Episcopalian, and—the catch-as-catch-can."

"Give us the ketch-and-kin-ketch-as-you-kin," responded the spokesman.

"Mebbe we ought to begin with Sunday-school," suggested the blacksmith. "That would sort of get us ready for the real shebang."

"How do you do it?" inquired Lufkins, the teamster.

"Oh, it's just mostly catechism," Jim imparted, sagely.

"And what's catechism?" said Bone.

"Catechism," drawled the miner, "is

where you ask a lot of questions that only the children can answer."

"I know," responded the blacksmith, squatting down before the anvil. "Little Skeezucks, who made you?"

The quaint little fellow looked at the brawny man timidly. How pale, how wee he appeared in all that company, as he sat on the great lump of iron, solemnly winking his big, brown eyes and clinging to his makeshift of a doll!

"Aw, say, give him something easy," said Lufkins.

"That's what they used to bang at me," said the smith, defending his position. "But I'll ask him the easiest one of the lot. Baby boy," he said, in a gentle way of his own, "who is it makes everything?—who makes all the lovely things in the world?"

Shyly the tiny man leaned back on the arm he felt he knew, and gravely, to the utter astonishment of the big, rough men, in his sweet baby utterance, he said:

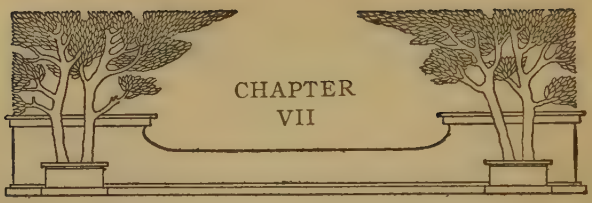
"Bruv-ver—Jim."

A roar of laughter instantly followed, giv-

ing the youngster a start that almost shook him from his seat.

"By jinks!" said Keno. "That's all right. You bet he knows."

But the Sunday-school programme was not again attempted. When something like calm had settled once more on the audience, If-only Jim remarked that he guessed they would have to quit their fooling and get down to the business of church.



THE SUNDAY HAPPENINGS

BUT to open the service when quiet reigned again and expectation was once more concentrated upon him afforded something of a poser still to the lanky old Jim, elected to perform the offices of leading.

"Where's Shorty Hobb with his fiddle?" said he.

"Parky wouldn't leave him come," answered Bone. "He loaned him money on his vierlin, and he says he owns it and won't leave him play in no church that ever got invented."

"Parky, hey?" said Jim, drawlingly. "Wal, bless his little home'pathic pill of a soul!"

"He says he's fed more poor and done more fer charity than any man in town," informed a voice.

"Does, hey?" said the miner. "I'll bet his belly's the only poor thing he feeds regular. His hand ain't got callous cutting bread for the orphans. But he ain't a subject for church. If only I'd 'a' known what he was agoin' to do I'd made a harp. But let it go. We'll start off with roll-call and follow that up with a song."

He therefore began with the name of Webber, who responded "Here," and proceeding to note who was present, he drawled the name or familiar sobriquet of each in turn, till all had admitted they were personally in attendance.

"Ahem," said Jim, at the end of this impressive ceremony. "Now we'll sing a hymn. What hymn do you fellows prefer?"

There was not a great confusion of replies; in fact, the confusion resulted from a lack thereof.

"As no one indicates a preference," announced the miner, "we'll tackle 'Darling, I am growing old.' Are there any objections? All in favor?—contrary minded?—the mo-

tion prevails. Now, then, all together—'Darling—' Why don't you all git in?"

"How does she go?" inquired Webber.

"She goes like this," Jim replied, clearing his throat:

> "'Darling, I am growing o-old,
> Silver bars among the gold;
> Shine upon—te dum te dumpty—
> Far from the old folks at home.'"

"Don't know it," said a voice.

"Neither do I."

"Nor I."

"Nor I."

The sheep of the flock all followed in a chorus of "Nor I's."

"What's the matter with 'Swing Low, Sweet Cheery O'?" inquired Lufkins.

"Suits me," Jim replied. "Steam up."

He and the teamster, in duet, joined very soon by all the congregation, sang over and over the only lines they could conjure back to memory, and even these came forth in remarkable variety. For the greater part, however, the rough men were fairly well united on the simple version:

"'Swing low, sweet cheery O,
Comin' for to carry me home;
Swing low, sweet cheery O,
Comin' for to carry me home.'"

This was sung no less than seven times, when Jim at length lifted his hand for the end.

"We'll follow this up with the Lord's Prayer," he said.

Laying his big, freckled hand on the shoulder of the wondering little pilgrim, seated so quietly upon the anvil, he closed his eyes and bowed his head. How thin, but kindly, was his rugged face as the lines were softened by his attitude!

He began with hesitation. The prayer, indeed, was a stumbling towards the long-forgotten—the wellnigh unattainable.

"'Our Father which art in heaven . . .
Our Father which art in heaven—'

"Now, hold on, just a minute," and he paused to think before resuming and wiped his suddenly sweating brow.

"'Our Father which art in heaven—
If I should die before I wake . . .
Give us our daily bread. Amen.'"

The men all sat in silence. Then Keno whispered, so loudly that every one could hear:

"By jinks! I didn't think he could do it!"

"We'll now have another hymn," announced the leader. "There used to be one that went on something about, 'I'm lost and far away from the shack, and it's dark, and lead me—somewhere—kindly light.' Any one remember the words all straight?"

"I don't," replied the blacksmith, "but I might come in on the chorus."

"Seems to me," said Bone, "a candle or just a plain, unvarnished light, would 'a' went out. It must have bin a lantern."

"Objection well taken," responded Jim, gravely. "I reckon I got it turned 'round a minute ago. It was more like:

> "'Lead me on, kindly lantern,
> For I am far from home,
> And the night is dark.'"

"It don't sound like a song—not exactly," ventured Lufkins. "Why not give 'em 'Down on the Swanee River'?"

"All right," agreed the "parson," and therefore they were all presently singing at the one perennial "hymn" of the heart, universal in its application, sweetly religious in its humanism. They sang it with a woful lack of its own original lines; they put in string on string of "dum te dums," but it came from their better natures and it sanctified the dingy shop.

When it was ended, which was not until it had gone through persistent repetitions, old Jim was prepared for almost anything.

"I s'pose you boys want a regular sermon," said he, "and if only I'd 'a' had the time—wal, I won't say what a torch-light procession of a sermon you'd have got, but I'll do the best I can."

He cleared his throat, struck an attitude inseparable from American elocution, and began:

"Fellow-citizens—and ladies and gentlemen—we—we're an ornary lot of backwoods fellers, livin' away out here in the mountains and the brush, but God Almighty 'ain't forgot us, all the same. He sent a little young-

ster once to put a heartful of happiness into men, and He's sent this little skeezucks here to show us boys we ain't shut off from everything. He didn't send us no bonanza—like they say they've got in Silver Treasury—but I wouldn't trade the little kid for all the bullion they will ever melt. We ain't the prettiest lot of ducks I ever saw, and we maybe blow the ten commandants all over the camp with giant powder once in a while, lookin' 'round for gold, but, boys, we ain't throwed out complete. We've got the love and pity of God Almighty, sure, when he gives us, all to ourselves, a little helpless feller for to raise. I know you boys all want me to thank the Father of us all, and that's what I do. And I hope He'll let us know the way to give the little kid a good square show, for Christ's sake. Amen."

The men would have listened to more. They expected more, indeed, and waited to hear old Jim resume.

"That's about all," he said, as no one spoke, "except, of course, we'll sing some more of the hymns and take up collec-

tion. I guess we'd better take collection first."

The congregation stirred. Big hands went down into pockets.

"Who gets the collection?" queried Field.

Jim drawled, "When it ain't buttons, it goes to the parson; when it is, the parson's wife gits in."

"You 'ain't got no wife," objected Bone.

"That's why there ain't goin' to be no buttons," sagely answered the miner. "On the square, though, boys, this is all for the little skeezucks, to buy some genuine milk, from Miss Doc Dennihan's goat."

"What we goin' to put our offerin's into?" asked the blacksmith, as the boys made ready with their contributions. "They used to hand around a pie-plate when I was a boy."

"We'll try to get along with a hat," responded Jim, "and Keno here can pass it 'round. I've often observed that a hat is a handy thing to collect things in, especially brains."

So the hat went quickly from one to an-

other, sagging more and more in the crown as it travelled.

The men had come forward to surround the anvil, with the tiny little chap upon its massive top, and not one in all the groups was there who did not feel that, left alone with the timid bit of a pilgrim, he could get him to talking and laughing in the briefest of moments.

The hymns with which old Jim had promised the meeting should conclude were all but forgotten. Two or three miners, whose hunger for song was not to be readily appeased, kept bringing the subject to the fore again, however, till at length they were heard.

"We're scarin' little Skeezucks, anyhow," said the brawny smith, once more reviving the fire in the forge.

"Let's sing 'In the Sweet By-and-By,' if all of us know it," suggested a young fellow scarcely more than a lad. "It's awful easy."

"Wal, you start her bilin'," replied the teamster.

The young fellow blushed, but he nerved himself to the point and sang out, nervously at first, and then, when his confidence increased, in a clear, ringing tenor of remarkable purity, recalling the old-time words that once were so widely known and treasured:

"'There's a land that is fairer than day,
And by faith we can see it afar,
For the Father waits over the way
To prepare us a dwelling-place there.'"

Then the chorus of voices, husky from neglect and crude from lack of culture, joined in the chorus, with a heartiness that shook the dingy building:

"'In the sweet by-and-by,
We shall meet on that beautiful shore;
In the sweet by-and-by,
We shall meet on that beautiful shore.'"

They followed this with what they knew of "Home, Sweet Home," and so at last strolled out into the sunshine of the street, and surrounded the quaint little foundling, as he looked from one to another in baby

gravity and sat in his timid way on the arm of "Bruvver Jim."

"I'll tell you what," said the blacksmith, "now that we've found that we can do the job all right, we'll get up a Christmas for little Skeezucks that will lift the mountains clean up off the earth!"

"Good suggestion," Jim agreed. "But the little feller feels tired now. I am goin' to take him home."

And this he did. But after lunch no fewer than twenty of the men of Borealis climbed up the trail to get another look at the quiet little man who glorified the cabin.

But the darkness had only begun to creep through the lowermost channels of the canyons when Skeezucks fell asleep. By then old Jim, the pup, and Keno were alone with the child.

"Keno, I reckon I'll wander quietly down and see if Doc will let me buy a little milk," said Jim. "You'd better come along to see that his sister don't interfere."

Keno expressed his doubts immediately, not only as to the excellence of goat's milk

generally, but likewise as to any good that he could do by joining Jim in the enterprise suggested.

"Anyway," he concluded, "Doc has maybe went on shift by this time. He's workin' nights this week again."

Jim, however, prevailed. "You don't get another bite of grub in this shack, nor another look at the little boy, if you don't come ahead and do your share."

Therefore they presently departed, shutting Tintoretto in the cabin to "watch."

In half an hour, having interviewed Doc Dennihan himself on the hill-side quite removed from his cabin, the two worthies came climbing up towards their home once again, Jim most carefully holding in his hands a large tin cup with half an inch of goat's milk at the bottom.

While still a hundred yards from the house, they were suddenly startled by the mad descent upon them of the pup they had recently left behind.

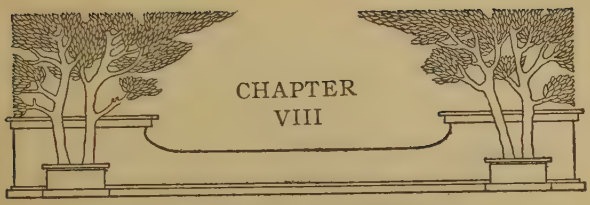
"Huh! you young galoot," said Jim. "You got out, I see!"

When he entered the cabin it was dark. Keno lighted the candle and Jim put his cup on the table. Then he went to the berth to awaken the tiny foundling and give him a supper of bread and milk.

Keno heard him make a sound as of one in terrible pain.

The miner turned a face, deadly white, towards the table.

"Keno," he cried, "he's gone!"



OLD JIM DISTRAUGHT

FOR a moment Keno failed to comprehend. Then for a second after that he refused to believe. He ran to the bunk where Jim was desperately turning down the blankets and made a quick examination of that as well as of the other beds.

They were empty.

Hastening across the cabin, the two men searched in the berths at the farther end with parental eagerness, but all in vain, the pup meantime dodging between their legs and chewing at their trousers.

"Tintoretto!" said Jim, in a flash of deduction. "He must have got out when somebody opened the door. Somebody's been here and stole my little boy!"

"By jinks!" said Keno, hauling at his sleeves in excess of emotion. "But who?"

"Come on," answered Jim, distraught and wild. "Come down to camp! Somebody's playin' us a trick!"

Again they shut the pup inside, and then they fairly ran down the trail, through the darkness, to the town below.

A number of men were standing in the street, among them the teamster and Field, the father of Borealis. They were joking, laughing, wasting time.

"Boys," cried Jim, as he hastened towards the group, "has any one seen little Skeezucks? Some one's played a trick and took him off! Somebody's been to the cabin and stole my little boy!"

"Stole him?" said Field. "Why, where was you and Keno?"

"Down to Doc's to get some milk. He wanted bread and milk," Jim explained, in evident anguish. "You fellows might have seen, if any one fetched him down the trail. You're foolin'. Some of you took him for a joke!"

"It wouldn't be no joke," answered Lufkins, the teamster. "We 'ain't got him, Jim, on the square."

"Of course we 'ain't got him. We 'ain't took him for no joke," said Field. "Nobody'd take him away like that."

"Why don't we ring the bar of steel we used for a bell," suggested one of the miners. "That would fetch the men—all who 'ain't gone back on shift."

"Good idea," said Field. "But I ought to get back home and eat some dinner."

He did not, however, depart. That Jim was in a fever of excitement and despair they could all of them see. He hastened ahead of the group to the shop of Webber, and taking a short length of iron chain, which he found on the earth, he slashed and beat at the bar of steel with frantic strength.

The sharp, metallic notes rang out with every stroke. The bar was swaying like a pendulum. Blow after blow the man delivered, filling all the hollows of the hills with wild alarm.

Out of saloons and houses men came saun-

tering, or running, according to the tension of their nerves. Many thought some house must be afire. At least thirty men were presently gathered at the place of summons. With five or six informers to tell the news of Jim's bereavement, all were soon aware of what was making the trouble. But none had seen the tiny foundling since they bade him good-bye in the charge of Jim himself.

"Are you plum dead sure he's went?" said Webber, the smith. "Did you look all over the cabin?"

"Everywhere," said Jim. "He's gone!"

"Wal, maybe some mystery got him," suggested Bone. "Jim, you don't suppose his father, or some one who lost him, come and nabbed him while you was gone?"

They saw old Jim turn pale in the light that came from across the street.

Keno broke in with an answer.

"By jinks! Jim was his mother! Jim had more good rights to the little feller than anybody, livin' or dead!"

"You bet!" agreed a voice.

Jim spoke with difficulty.

"If any one did that"—he faltered—"why, boys, he never should have let me find him in the brush."

"Are you plum dead sure he's went?" insisted the blacksmith, whom the news had somewhat stunned.

"I thought perhaps you fellows might have played a joke—taken him off to see me run around," said Jim, with a faint attempt at a smile. "'Ain't you got him, boys—all the time?"

"Aw, no, he'd be too scared," said Bone. "We know he'd be scared of any one of us."

"It ain't so much that," said Field, "but I shouldn't wonder if his father, or some other feller just as good, came and took him off."

"Of course his father would have the right," said Jim, haltingly, "but—I wish he hadn't let me find him first. You fellows are sure you ain't a-foolin'?"

"We couldn't have done it—not on Sunday—after church," said Lufkins. "*No*, Jim, we wouldn't fool that way."

"You don't s'pose that Parky might have took him, out of spite?" said Jim, eager for hope in any direction whatsoever.

"No! He hates kids worse than pizen," said the barkeep, decisively. "He's been a-gamblin' since four this afternoon, dealin' faro-bank."

"We could go and search every shack in camp," suggested a listener.

"What would be the good of that?" inquired Field. "If the father came and took the little shaver, do you think he'd hide him 'round here in somebody's cabin?"

The blacksmith said: "It don't seem as if you could have looked all over the house. He's such a little bit of a skeezucks."

Keno told him how they had searched in every bunk, and how the milk was waiting on the table, and how the pup had escaped when some one opened the door.

The men all volunteered to go up on the hill with torches and lanterns, to see if the trail of the some one who had done this deed might not be discovered. Accordingly, the lights were secured and the party climbed

the slope. All of them entered the cabin and heard the explanation of exactly how old Jim had found that the little chap was gone.

Webber was one of the number. To satisfy his incredulous mind, he searched every possible and impossible lurking-place where an object as small as a ball could be concealed.

"I guess he's went," he agreed, at last.

Then out on the hill-side went the crowd, and breaking up in groups, each with its lanterns and torches, they searched the rock-strewn slope in every direction. The wavering lights went hither and yon, revealing now the faces of the anxious men, and then prodigious features of a clump of granite bowlders, jewelled with mica, sparkling in the light.

Intensely the darkness hedged the groups about. The sounds of their voices and of rocks that crunched beneath their boots alone disturbed the great, eternal calm; but the search was vain. The searchers had known it could be of no avail, for the puny foot of man could have made no track upon

the slanted floor of granite fragments that constituted the hill-side. It was something to do for Jim, and that was all.

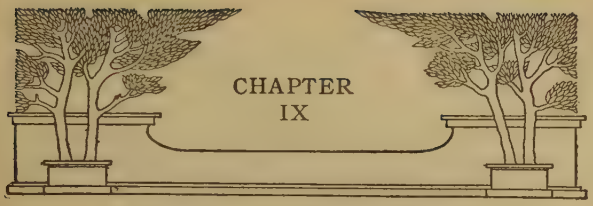
At length, about midnight, it came to an end. They lingered on the slope, however, to offer their theories, invariably hopeful, and to say that Monday morning would accomplish miracles in the way of setting everything aright.

Many were supperless when all save Jim and little Keno had again returned to Borealis and left the two alone at the cabin.

"We'll save the milk in case he might come home by any chance," said the gray old miner, and he placed the cup on a shelf against the wall.

In silence he cooked the humble dinner, which he placed on the table in front of his equally voiceless companion. Keno and the pup went at the meal with unpoetic vigor, but Jim could do no eating. He went to the door from time to time to listen. Then he once more searched the blankets in the bunks.

"Wal, anyway," said he, at last, "he took his doll."



THE GUILTY MISS DOC

THAT Keno and Tintoretto should sleep was inevitable, after the way they had eaten. Old Jim then took his lantern and went out alone. Perhaps his tiny foundling had wandered away by himself, he thought. Searching and searching, up hill and down, lighting his way through the brush, the miner went on and on, to leave no spot unvisited. He was out all night, wandering here and climbing there on the hillside, pausing now and again to listen and to look about, almost expectantly, where naught could be seen save the mighty procession of the stars, and naught could be heard save the ringing of the inter-stellar silence as the earth swung steadily onward in her course.

Hour after hour of the darkness went by

and found him searching still. With the coming of the morning he suddenly grasped at a startling thought.

Miss Doc! — Miss Dennihan! She must have stolen his foundling!

Her recent climb to his cabin, her protracted stay, her baffled curiosity — these were ample explanation for the trick she must have played! How easily she might have watched the place, slipped in the moment the cabin was left unguarded, and carried off the little pilgrim!

Jim knew she would glory in such a revenge. She probably cared not a whit for the child, but to score against himself, for defeating her purpose when she called, she would doubtless have gone to any possible length.

The miner was enraged, but a second later a great gush of thankfulness and relief surged upward in his heart. At least, the little man would not have been out all night in the hills! Then growing sick in turn, he thought this explanation would be too good to be true. It was madness—only a hope! He

clung to it tenaciously, however, then gave it up, only to snatch it back again in desperation as he hastened home to his cabin.

"Keno, wake up," he cried to his lodger, shaking him briskly by the shoulder. "Keno! Keno!"

"What's the matter? Time for breakfast?" asked Keno, drowsily, risking only half an eye with which to look about. "Why not call me gently?"

"Get up!" commanded Jim. "I have thought of where little Skeezucks has gone!"

"Where?" cried Keno, suddenly aroused. "I'll go and kill the cuss that took him off!"

"Miss Doc!" replied the miner. "Miss Doc!"

"Miss Doc?" repeated Keno, weakly, pausing in the act of pulling on his boots. "By jinks! Say, I couldn't kill no woman, Jim. How do you know?"

"Stands to reason," Jim replied, and explaining his premises rapidly and clearly, he punched poor Keno into something almost as good as activity.

"By jinks! I can't believe it," said Keno,

who did believe it with fearful thoroughness. "Jim, she wouldn't dare, an' us two fellers liable to bust her house to pieces."

"Don't you know she'd be dead sure to play a trick like that?" said Jim, who could not bear to listen to a doubt. "Don't you see she couldn't do anything else, bein' a woman?"

"Maybe—maybe," answered Keno, with a sort of acquiescence that is deadlier than an out-and-out denial. "But—I wouldn't want to see you disappointed, Jim — I wouldn't want to see it."

"Wal, you come on, that's all," said Jim. "If it ain't so—I want to know it early in the day!"

"But — what can I do?" still objected Keno. "Wouldn't you rather I'd stay home and git the breakfast?"

"We don't want any breakfast if she 'ain't got the little boy. You come on!"

Keno came; so did Tintoretto. The three went down the slope as the sun looked over the rim of the mountains. The chill and crispness of the air seemed a part of those early rays of light.

In sight of the home of Doc and Miss Dennihan, they paused and stepped behind a fence, for the door of the neat little house was open and the lady herself was sweeping off the steps, with the briskness inseparable from her character.

She presently disappeared, but the door, to Jim's relief, was left standing open. He proceeded boldly on his course.

"Now, I'll stay outside and hold the pup," said Keno.

"If anything goes wrong, you let the pup go loose," instructed Jim. "He might distract her attention."

Thereupon he went in at the creaking little garden gate, and, leaving it open, knocked on the door and entered the house. He had hardly more than come within the room when Miss Doc appeared from her kitchen.

"Mercy in us, if you ain't up before your breakfast!" she said. "Whatever do you want in my house at this time of mornin', you Jim lazy-joints?"

"You know what I came for," said Jim. "I want my little boy."

"Your little boy?" she echoed. "I never knowed you had no little boy. You never said nuthin' 'bout no little boy when I was up to your cabin."

Jim's heart, despite his utmost efforts to be hopeful, was sinking.

"You know I found a little kid," he said, less aggressively. "And some one's taken him off — stole him — that's what they've done, and I'll bet a bit it's you!"

"Wal, if I ever!" cried Miss Doc, her eyes lighting up dangerously. "Did you come down here to tell me right to my face I stole from your dirty little shanty?"

"I want my little boy," said Jim.

"Wal, you git out of my house," commanded Miss Doc. "If John was up you'd never dare to stay here another minute. You clear out! A-callin' me a thief!"

Jim's hope collapsed in his bosom. The taking of the child he could gladly have forgiven. Any excuse would have satisfied his anger—anything was bearable, save to know that he had come on a false belief.

"Miss Doc," he said, "I only want the little kid. Don't say he ain't here."

"Tellin' me I'd steal!" she said, in her indignation. "You shiftless, good-for-nothin'—" But she left her string of epithets incompleted, all on account of an interruption in the shape of Tintoretto.

Keno had made up his mind that everything was going wrong, and he had loosed the pup.

Bounding in at the door, that enthusiastic bit of awkwardness and good intentions jumped on the front of Miss Doc's dress, gave a lick at her hand, scooted back to his master, and wagged himself against the tables, chairs, and walls with clumsy dexterity. Sniffing and bumping his nose on the carpet, he pranced through the door to the kitchen.

Almost immediately Jim heard the sound of something being bowled over on the floor —something being licked—something vainly striving with the over-affectionate pup, and then there came a coo of joy.

"There he is!" cried Jim, and before Miss

Doc could lift so much as hand or voice to restrain him, he had followed Tintoretto and fallen on his knees by the side of his lost little foundling, who was helplessly straddled by the pup, and who, for the first time, dropped his doll as he held out his tiny arms to be taken.

"My little boy!" said the miner—"my little boy!" and taking both doll and little man in his arms he held them in passionate tenderness against his heart.

"How da'st you come in my kitchen with your dirty boots?" demanded Miss Dennihan, in all her unabashed pugnacity.

"It's all right, little Skeezucks," said Jim to the timid little pilgrim, who was clinging to his collar with all the strength of a baby's new confidence and hope. "Did you think old brother Jim was lost? Did you want to go home and get some bread and milk?"

"He ain't a bit hungry. He didn't want nuthin' to eat," said Miss Doc, in self-defence. "And you ain't no more fit to have that there child than a—"

"Goin' to have him all the same," old

Jim interrupted, starting for the door. "You stole him—that's what you did!"

"I didn't do no sech thing," said the housewife. "I jest nachelly borrowed him —jest for over night. And now you've got him, I hope you're satisfied. And you kin jest clear out o' my house, do you hear? And I can't scrub and sweep too soon where your lazy, dirty old boots has been on the floor!"

"Wal," drawled Jim, "I can't throw away these boots any too soon, neither. I wouldn't wear a pair of boots which had stepped on any floor of yours."

He therefore left the house at once, even as the lady began her violent sweeping. Interrupting Keno's mad chortles of joy at sight of little Skeezucks, Jim gave him the tiny man for a moment's keeping, and, taking off his boots, threw them down before Miss Dennihan's gate in extravagant pride.

Then once more he took his little man on his arm and started away. But when he had walked a half-dozen rods, on the rocks that indented the tender soles of his stockinged

feet, he was stepping with gingerly uncertainty. He presently came to a halt. The ground was not only lumpy, it was cold.

"I'll tell you what," he slowly drawled, "in this little world there's about one chance in a million for a man to make a President of himself, and about nine hundred and ninety-nine chances in a thousand for him to make a fool of himself."

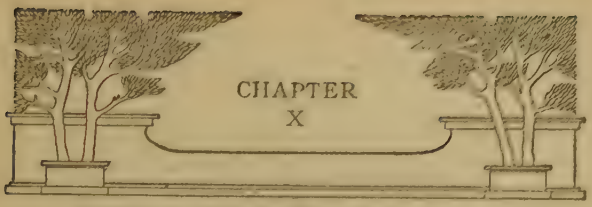
"That's what I thought," said Keno.

"All the same, if only I had the resolution I'd leave them boots there forever!"

"What for?" said Keno.

"Wal," drawled Jim, "a man can't always tell he comes of a proud family by the cut of his clothes. But, Keno, you ain't troubled with pride, so you go back and fetch me the boots."

Then, when he presently drew his cowhide casings on, he sat for a moment enjoying the comfort of those soles beneath his feet. For the time that they halted where they were, he held his rescued little boy to his heart in an ecstasy such as he never had dreamed could be given to a man.



PREPARATIONS FOR CHRISTMAS

WHEN the word spread 'round that Jim and the quaint little foundling were once more united, the story of the episode at Miss Doc's home necessarily followed to make the tale complete. Immensely relieved and grateful, to know that no dire calamity had befallen the camp's first and only child, the rough men nevertheless lost no time in conceiving the outcome to be fairly amusing.

"You kin bet that Doc was awake all the time, and listenin', as long as Jim was there," said Bone, "but six yoke of oxen couldn't 'a' dragged his two eyes open, or him out of bed, to mingle in the ceremonies."

To prevent a recurrence of similar descents upon his household, Jim arranged his plans in such a manner that the timid little Skee-

zucks should never again be left alone. Indeed, the gray old miner hardly ever permitted the little chap to be out of his sight. Hour by hour, day by day, he remained at his cabin, playing with the child, telling him stories, asking him questions, making him promises of all the wonderful toys and playthings he would manufacture soon.

Once in a while the little fellow spoke. That utterance came with difficulty to his lips was obvious. He must always have been a silent, backward little fellow, and sad, as children rarely become at an age so tender. Of who or what he was he gave no clew. He seemed to have no real name, to remember no parents, to feel no confidence in anything save "Bruvver Jim" and Tintoretto.

In the course of a week a number of names had been suggested for the tiny bit of a stranger, but none could suit the taste of Jim. He waited still for a truant inspiration, and meanwhile "Skeezucks" came daily more and more into use among the men of Borealis.

It was during this time that a parcel ar-

rived at the cabin from the home of Miss Doc. It was fetched to the hill by Doc himself, who said it was sent by his sister. He departed at once, to avoid the discussion which he felt its contents might occasion.

On tearing it open old Jim was not a little amazed to discover a lot of little garments, fashioned to the size of tiny Skeezucks, with all the skill which lies—at nature's second thought — in the hand of woman. Neat little undergarments, white little frocks, a something that the miner felt by instinct was a "nightie," and two pairs of the smallest of stockings rewarded the overhauling of the package, and left Jim momentarily speechless.

"By jinks!" said Keno, pulling down his sleeves, "them are awful small fer us!"

"If only I had the time," drawled Jim, "I'd take 'em back to Miss Doc and throw them in her yard. We don't need anybody sewin' for little Skeezucks. I was meanin' to make him somethin' better than these myself."

"Oh!" said Keno. "Well, we could give

'em to the pup. He'd like to play with them little duds."

"No; I'll try 'em on the little boy tonight," reflected Jim, "and then, if we find they ain't a fit, why, I'll either send 'em back or cut 'em apart and sew 'em all over and make 'em do."

But once he had tried them on, their fate was sealed. They remained as much a part of the tiny man as did his furry doll. Indeed, they were presently almost forgotten, for December being well advanced, the one great topic of conversation now was the Christmas celebration to be held for the camp's one little child.

Ten of the big, rough citizens had come one evening to the cabin on the hill, to settle on some of the details of what they should do. The tiny pilgrim, whom they all regarded so fondly, had gone to sleep and Jim had placed him in his bunk. In the chimney a glowing fire drove away the chill of the wintry air.

"Speakin' of catfish, of course we'll hang up his stockin'," said Field. "Christmas

wouldn't be no Christmas without a stockin'."

"Stockin'!" echoed the blacksmith. "We'll have to hang up a minin'-shaft, I reckon, for to hold all the things."

"I'm goin' to make him a kind of kaliderscope myself, or maybe two or three," said one modest individual, stroking his chin.

Dunn, the most unworkman-like carpenter that ever built a crooked house, declared it was his intention to fashion a whole set of alphabetical blocks of prodigious size and unearthly beauty.

"Well, I can't make so much in the way of fancy fixin's, but you jest wait and see," said another.

The blacksmith darkly hinted at wonders evolving beneath the curly abundance of his hair, and Lufkins likewise kept his purposes to himself.

"I s'pose we'd ought to have a tree," said Jim. "We could make a Christmas-tree look like the Garden of Eden before Mrs. Adam began to eat the ornaments."

"That's the ticket," Webber agreed. "That's sure the boss racket of them all."

"We couldn't git no tree into this shanty," objected Field. "This place ain't big enough to hold a Christmas puddin'."

"Of course it is," said the carpenter. "It's ten foot ten by eighteen foot six inches, or I can't do no guessin'."

"That 'mount of space couldn't hold jest me, on Christmas," estimated the teamster.

"And the whole camp sure will want to come," added another.

"'Ceptin' Miss Doc," suggested Webber.

"'Ceptin' Miss Doc," agreed the previous speaker.

"Then why not have the tree down yonder, into Webber's shop, same as church?" asked Field. "We could git the whole camp in there."

This was acclaimed a thought of genius.

"It suits me down to the ground," said Jim, with whom all ultimate decision lay, by right of his foster-parenthood of little Skeezucks, "only I don't see so plain where we're goin' to git the tree. We're burnin'

all the biggest brush around Borealis, and there ain't a genuine Christmas-tree in forty miles."

The truth of this observation fell like a dampened blanket on all the company.

"That's so," said Webber. "That's just the luck!"

"There's a bunch of willers and alders by the spring," suggested a hopeful person.

"You pore, pitiful cuss," said Field. "You couldn't have seen no Christmas-tree in all your infancy."

"If only I had the time," drawled Jim, "I'd go across to the Pinyon mountains and git a tree. Perhaps I can do that yet."

"If you'd do that, Jim, that would be the biggest present of the lot," said Webber. "You wouldn't have to do nuthin' more."

"Wal, I'm goin' to make a Noah's ark full of animals, anyway," said Jim. "Also a few cars and boats and a big tin horn—if only I've got the activity."

"But we'll reckon on you for the tree," insisted the blacksmith. "Then, of course, we want a great big Christmas dinner."

"What are you goin' to do fer a turkey?" inquired Field.

"And rich brown gravy?" added the carpenter.

"And cranberry sauce and mince-pie?" supplemented Lufkins.

"Well, maybe we could git a rabbit for the turkey," answered the smith.

"And, by jinks! I kin make a lemon-pie that tastes like a chunk dropped out of heaven," volunteered Keno, pulling at his sleeves.

"But what about that rich brown gravy?" queried the carpenter.

"Smoky White can dish up the slickest dough-nuts you ever slapped your lip onto," informed the modest individual who stroked his chin.

"We can have pertatoes and beans and slapjacks on the side," a hopeful miner reminded the company.

"You bet. Don't you worry; we can trot out a regular banquet," Field assured them, optimistically. "S'posen we don't have turkey and cranberry sauce and a big mince-pie?"

"I'd like that rich brown gravy," murmured the carpenter—"good and thick and rich and brown."

"We could rig up a big, long table in the shop," planned the blacksmith, "and put a hundred candles everywhere, and have the tree all blazin' with lights, and you bet things would be gorgeous."

"If we git the tree," said Lufkins.

"And the rabbit fer a turkey," added a friend.

"Well, by jinks! you'll git the lemon-pie all right, if you don't git nuthin' else," declared little Keno.

"If only I can plan it out I'll fetch the tree," said Jim. "I'd like to do that for the little boy."

"Jim's an awful clever ole cuss," said Field, trusting to work some benefit by a judicious application of flattery. "It ain't every man which knows the kind of a tree to chop. Not all trees is Christmas-trees. But ole Jim is a clever ole duck, you bet."

"Wal," drawled Jim, "I never suspect my own intelligence till a man begins to tell me

I'm a clever old duck. Still, I reckon I ain't over-likely to cut no cherry-trees over to the Pinyon hills."

"The celebration's comin' to a head in bully style, that's the main concern," said the teamster. "I s'pose we'd better begin to invite all the boys?"

"If all of 'em come," suggested a listener, "that one jack-rabbit settin' up playin' turkey will look awful sick."

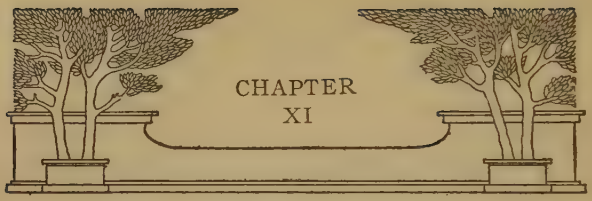
"I'd hate to git left on the gravy," added the carpenter—"if there's goin' to be any gravy."

"Aw, we'll have buckets of grub," said the smith. "We'll ask 'em all to 'please bring refreshments,' same as they do in families where they never git a good square meal except at surprise-parties and birthday blow-outs. Don't you fear about the feed."

"Well, we ought to git the jig to goin'," suggested Field. "Lots of the boys needs a good fair warnin' when they're goin' to tackle cookin' grub for a Christmas dinner. I vote we git out of here and go down hill and talk the racket up."

This motion was carried at once. The boys filed out with hearty good-nights, and wended their way down the slope, with the bite of the frosted air at their ears.

Then Jim, at the very thought of travelling forty miles to fetch a tree for Christmas gayeties, sat down before his fire to take a rest.



CHAPTER XI

TROUBLES AND DISCOVERIES

FOR the next ten days the talk of the camp was the coming celebration. Moreover, man after man was surrounding himself with mystery impenetrable, as he drew away in his shell, so to speak, to undergo certain throes of invention and secret manufacture of presents for the tiny boy at the cabin on the hill. Knowing nods, sly winks, and jealous guarding of their cleverness marked the big, rough fellows one by one. And yet some of the most secretive felt a necessity for consulting Jim as to what was appropriate, what would please little Skeezucks, and what was worthy to be tied upon the tree.

That each and every individual thus laboring to produce his offering should be eager

to excel his neighbor, and to win the greatest appreciation from the all-unknowing little pilgrim for his own particular toy or trinket, was a natural outcome of the Christmas spirit actuating the manœuvres. And all the things they could give would have to be made, since there was not a shop in a radius of a hundred miles where baubles for youngsters could be purchased, while Borealis, having never had a baby boy before in all its sudden annals of being, had neglected all provision for the advent of tiny Skeezucks.

The carpenter came to the cabin first, with a barley-sack filled with the blocks he had made for the small foundling's Christmas ecstasy. Before he would show them, however, Keno was obliged to leave the house and the tiny pilgrim himself was placed in a bunk from which he could not see.

"I want to surprise him," explained the carpenter.

He then dumped out his blocks.

As lumber was a luxury in Borealis, he had been obliged to make what shift he could. In consequence of this the blocks were of sev-

eral sizes, a number were constructed of several pieces of board nailed together—and split in the process—no two were shaped alike, except for generalities, and no one was straight. However, they were larger than a man's two fists, they were gaudily painted, and the alphabet was sprinkled upon them with prodigal generosity. There were even hieroglyphics upon them, which the carpenter described as birds and animals. They were certainly more than any timid child could ever have demanded.

"Them's it," said Dunn, watching the face of Jim with what modest pride the situation would permit. "Now, what I want you to do is to give me a genuine, candid opinion of the work."

"Wal, I'll tell you," drawled the miner, "whenever a man asks you for a candid opinion, that's the time to fill your shovel with guff. It's the only safe proceedin'. So I won't fool around with candid opinions, Dunn, I'll just admit they are jewels. Cut my diamonds if they ain't!"

"I kind of thought so myself," confessed

the carpenter. "But I thought as you was a first-class critic, why, I'd like to hear what you'd say."

"No, I ain't no critic," Jim replied. "A critic is a feller who can say nastier things than anybody else about things that anybody else can do a heap sight better than he can himself."

"Well, I do reckon, as who shouldn't say so, that nobody livin' into Borealis but me could 'a' made them blocks," agreed Dunn, returning the lot to his sack. "But I jest wanted to hear you say so, Jim, fer you and me has had an eddication which lots of cusses into camp 'ain't never got. Not that it's anything agin 'em, but—you know how it is. I'll bet the little shaver will like them better'n anything else he'll git."

"Oh, he'll like 'em in a different way," agreed the miner. "No doubt about that."

And when the carpenter had gone old Jim took his little foundling from the berth and sat him on his knee.

In the tiny chap's arms the powder-flask-and-potato doll was firmly held. The face

of the lady had wrinkled with a premature descent of age upon her being. One of her eyes had disappeared, while her soot-made mouth had been wiped across her entire countenance.

The quaint bit of a boy was dressed, as usual, in the funny little trousers that came to his heels, while his old fur cap had been kept in requisition for the warmth it afforded his ears. He cuddled confidingly against his big, rough protector, but he made no sound of speaking, nor did anything suggestive of a smile come to play upon his grave little features.

Jim had told him of Christmas by the hour—all the beauty of the story, so old, so appealing to the race of man, who yearns towards everything affording a brightness of hope and a faith in anything human.

"What would little Skeezucks like for his Christmas?" the man inquired, for the twentieth time.

The little fellow pressed closer against him, in baby shyness and slowly answered:

"Bruv-ver—Jim."

The miner clasped him tenderly against his heart. Yet he had but scanty intimation of the all the tiny pilgrim meant.

He sat with him throughout that day, however, as he had so many of these fleeting days. The larder was neglected; the money contributed at "church" had gone at once, to score against a bill at the store, as large as the cabin itself, and only the labors of Keno, chopping brush for fuel, kept the home supplied even with a fire. Jim had been born beneath the weight of some star too slow to move along.

When Keno came back to the cabin from his work in the brush it was well along in the afternoon. Jim decided to go below and stock up the pantry with food. On arriving at the store, however, he met a new manner of reception.

The gambler, Parky, was in charge, as a recent purchaser of the whole concern.

"You can't git no more grub-stake here without the cash," he said to Jim. "And now you've come, you can pony up on the bill you 'ain't yet squared."

"So?" said Jim.

"You bet your boots it's so, and you can't begin to pungle up a minute too soon!" was the answer.

"I reckon you'd ask a chicken to pungle up the gravel in his gizzard if you thought he'd picked up a sliver of gold," Jim drawled, in his lazy utterance. "And an ordinary chicken, with the pip thrown in, could pungle twice to my once."

"'Ain't got the stuff, hey?" said Parky. "Broke, I s'pose? Then maybe you'll git to work, you old galoot, and stop playin' parson and goody-goody games. You don't git nothing here without the chink. So perhaps you'll git to work at last."

A red-nosed henchman of the gambler's put in a word.

"I don't see why you 'ain't gone to work," he said.

"Don't you?" drawled Jim, leaning on the counter to survey the speaker. "Well, it looks to me as if you found out, long ago, that all work and no play makes a man a Yankee."

"I ain't no Yankee, you kin bet on that!" said the man.

"That's pretty near incredible," drawled Jim.

"And I ain't neither," declared the gambler, who boasted of being Canadian. "Don't you forget that, old boy."

"No," Jim slowly replied, "I've often noticed that all that glitters ain't American."

"Well, you can clear out of here and notice how things look outside," retorted Parky.

Jim was slowly straightening up when the blacksmith and the teamster entered the place. They had heard the gambler's order and were thoroughly astounded. No man, howsoever poor and unprepared to pay a wretched bill, had ever been treated thus in Borealis before.

"What's the matter?" said Webber.

"Nuthin', particularly," answered Jim, in his slow, monotonous way, "only a difference of opinion. Parky thinks he's brainy, and a gentleman—that's all."

"I can see you don't git another snack of

grub in here, my friend," retorted Parky, adding a number of oaths. "And for just two cents I'd break your jaw and pitch you out in the street."

"Not with your present flow of language," answered Jim.

The teamster inquired, "Why don't Jim git any more grub?"

"Because I'm running this joint and he 'ain't got the cash," said Parky. "You got anything to say about the biz?"

"Jim's got a call on me and my cash," replied the brawny Webber. "Jim, you tell him what you need, and I'll foot the bill."

"I'll settle half, myself," added Lufkins.

"Thanks, boys, not this evenin'," said Jim, whose pride had singular moments for coming to the surface. "There's only one time of day when it's safe to deal with a gambler, and that's thirteen o'clock."

"I wouldn't sell you nothing, anyway," said Parky, with a swagger. "He couldn't git grub here now for no money—savvy?"

"I wonder why you call it grub, now that it's come into your greasy hands!" drawled

the miner, as he slowly started to leave the store. "I'd be afraid you'd deal me a dirty ace of spades instead of a decent slice of bacon." And, hands in pockets, he sauntered away, vaguely wondering what he should do.

The blacksmith hung for a moment in the balance of indecision, rapidly thinking. Then he followed where the gray old Jim had gone, and presently overtook him in the road.

"Jim," he said, "what about poor little Skeezucks? Say, I'll tell you what we'll do: I'll wait a little, and then send Field to the store and have him git whatever you need, and pretend it's all for himself. Then we'll lug it up the hill and slide it into the cabin slick as a lead two-bits."

"Can't let you do it," said Jim.

"Why not?" demanded Webber.

Jim hesitated before he drawled his reply.

"If only I had the resolution," said he, "I wouldn't take nothing that Parky could sell."

"When we git you once talkin' 'if-only,' the bluff is called," replied the smith, with

a grin. "Now what are you needin' at the shack?"

"You rich fellers want to run the whole shebang," objected Jim, by way of an easy capitulation. "There never yet was a feller born with a silver spoon in his mouth that didn't want to put it in every other feller's puddin'. . . . I was goin' to buy a can or two of condensed milk and a slab of bacon and a sack of flour and a bean or two and a little 'baccy, and a few things about like that."

"All right," said the blacksmith, tabulating all these items on his fingers. "And Field kin look around and see if there ain't some extrys for little Skeezucks."

"If only I had the determination I wouldn't accept a thing from Parky's stock," drawled the miner, as before. "I'll go to work on the claim and pay you back right off."

"Kerrect," answered Webber, as gravely as possible, thinking of the hundred gaudy promises old Jim had made concerning his undeveloped and so far worthless claim. "I hope you'll strike it good and rich."

"Wal," drawled Jim; "bad luck has to

associate with a little good luck once in a while, to appear sort of half-way respectable. And my luck — same as any tired feller's — 'ain't been right good Sunday-school company for several years."

So he climbed back up the hill once more, and, coming to his cabin, had a long, earnest look at the picks, bars, drills, and other implements of mining, heavy with dust, in the corner.

"If only the day wasn't practically gone," said he, "I'd start to work on the claim this afternoon."

But he touched no tools, and presently instead he took the grave little foundling on his knee and told him, all over, the tales the little fellow seemed most to enjoy.

When the stock of provisions was finally fetched to the house by Webber himself, the worthy smith was obliged to explain that part of the money supplied to Field for the purchase of the food had been confiscated for debt at the store. In consequence of this the quantity had been cut to a half its intended dimensions.

"And the worst of it is," said the blacksmith, in conclusion, "we all owe a little at the store, and Parky's got suspicious that we're sneakin' things to you."

Indeed, as he left the house, he saw that certain red-nosed microbe of a human being attached to the gambler, spying on his visit to the hill. Stopping for a moment to reflect upon the nearness of Christmas and the needless worry that he might inflict by informing Jim of his discovery, Webber shook his head and went his way, keeping the matter to himself.

But with food in the house old Jim was again at ease, so much so, indeed, that he quite forgot to begin that promised work upon his claim. He had never worked except when dire necessity made resting no longer possible, and then only long enough to secure the wherewithal for sufficient food to last him through another period of sitting around to think. If thinking upon subjects of no importance whatsoever had been a lucrative employment, Jim would certainly have accumulated the wealth of the whole wide world.

He took his pick in his hands the following day, but placed it again in its corner, slowly, after a moment's examination of its blunted steel.

Three days went by. The weather was colder. Bitter winds and frowning clouds were hastening somewhere to a conclave of the wintry elements. It was four days only to Christmas. Neither the promised Noah's ark to present to tiny Skeezucks nor the Christmas-tree on which the men had planned to hang their gifts was one whit nearer to realization than as if they had never been suggested.

Meantime, once again the food-supply was nearly gone. Keno kept the pile of fuel reasonably high, but cheer was not so prevalent in the cabin as to ask for further room. The grave little pilgrim was just a trifle quieter and less inclined to eat. He caught a cold, as tiny as himself, but bore its miseries uncomplainingly. In fact, he had never cried so much as once since his coming to the cabin; and neither had he smiled.

In sheer concern old Jim went forth that

cold and windy afternoon of the day but four removed from Christmas, to make at least a show of working on his claim. Keno, Skeezucks, and the pup remained behind, the little red-headed man being busily engaged in some great culinary mystery from which he said his lemon-pie for Christmas should evolve.

When presently Jim stood beside the meagre post-hole he had made once upon a time, as a starter for a mining-shaft, he looked at it ruefully. How horridly hard that rock appeared! What a wretched little scar it was he had made with all that labor he remembered so vividly! What was the good of digging here? Nothing!

Dragging his pick, he looked for a softer spot in which to sink the steel. There were no softer spots. And the pick helve grew so intensely cold! Jim dropped it to the ground, and with hands thrust into his armpits, for the warmth afforded, he hunched himself dismally and scanned the prospect with doleful eyes. Why couldn't the hill break open, anyhow, and show whether any-

thing worth the having were contained in its bulk or not?

A last summer's mullen stock, beating incessantly in the wind, seemed the only thing alive on all that vast outbulging of the earth. The stunted brush stiffly carded the breeze that blew so persistently.

From rock to rock the gray old miner's gaze went wandering. So undisturbed had been the surface of the earth since he had owned the claim that a shallow channel, sluiced in the earth by a freshet of the spring long past, remained as the waters had cut it. Slowly up the course of this insignificant cicatrice old Jim ascended, his hands still held beneath his arms, his long mustache and his grizzled beard blown awry in the breeze. The pick he left behind.

Coming thus to a deeper gouge in the sand of the hill, he halted and gazed attentively at a thick seam of rock outcropping sharply where the long-gone freshet had laid it bare. In mining parlance it was "quartzy." To Jim it appeared even more. He stooped above it and attempted to break away a frag-

ment with his fingers. At this he failed. Rubbing off the dust and sand wherewith old mother nature was beginning to cover it anew, he saw little spots, at which he scratched with his nails.

"Awful cold it's gittin'," he drawled to himself, and sitting down on the meagre bank of earth he once more thrust his hands beneath his coat and looked at the outcropping dismally.

He had doubtless been gone from the cabin half an hour, and not a stroke had he given with his pick, when, as he sat there looking at the ground, the voice of Keno came on the wind from the door of the shack. Arising, Jim started at once towards his home, leaving his pick on the hill-side a rod or two below.

"What is it?" he called, as he neared the house.

"Calamerty!" yelled Keno, and he disappeared within the door.

Jim almost made haste.

"What kind of a calamity?" said he, as he entered the room. "What's went wrong?"

"The lemon-pie!" said, Keno, whose face was a study in the art of expressing consternation.

"Oh," said Jim, instantly relieved, "is that all?"

"All?" echoed Keno. "By jinks! I can't make another before it's Christmas, to save my neck, and I used all the sugar and nearly all the flour we had."

"Is it a hopeless case?" inquired Jim.

"Some might not think so," poor Keno replied. "I scoured out the old Dutch oven and I've got her in a-bakin', but—"

"Well, maybe she ain't so worse."

"Jim," answered Keno, tragically, "I didn't find out till I had her bakin' fine. Then I looked at the bottle I thought was the lemon extract, and, by jinks! what do you think?"

"I don't feel up to the arts of creatin' lemon-pies," confessed the miner, warming himself before the fire. "What happened?"

"You have to have lemon extract—you know that?" said Keno.

"All right."

"Well, by jinks, Jim, it wasn't lemon extract after all! It was hair-oil!"

A terrible moment of silence ensued.

Then Jim said, "Was it all the hair-oil I had?"

"Every drop," said Keno.

"Wal," drawled the miner, sagely, "don't take on too hard. Into each picnic some rain must fall."

"But the boys won't eat it," answered Keno, inconsolably.

"You don't know," replied Jim. "You never can tell what people will eat on Christmas till the follerin' day. They'll take to anything that looks real pretty and smells seasonable. What did I do with my pick?"

"You must have left it behind," said Keno. "You ain't goin' to hit the pie with your pick?"

"Wal, not till Christmas, anyway, Keno, and only then in case we've busted all the knives and saws trying to git it apart," said Jim, reassuringly.

"Would you keep it, sure, and feed it to

'em all the same?" inquired Keno, forlornly, eager for a ray of hope.

"I certainly would," replied the miner. "They won't know the diff between a lemon-pie and a can of tomatoes. So I guess I'll go and git my pick. It may come on to snow, and then I couldn't find it till the spring."

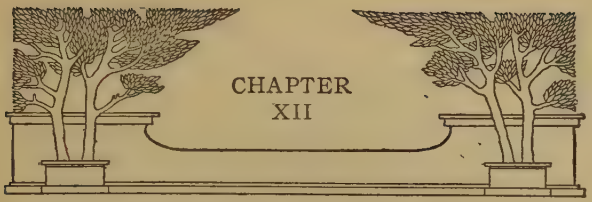
Without the slightest intention of working any more, Jim sauntered back to the place where the pick was lying on the hill and took it up. By chance he thought of the ledge of quartz above in the rain-sluiced channel.

"Might as well hit her a lick," he drawled to himself, and climbing to the spot he drove the point of his implement into a crevice of the rock and broke away a piece of two or three pounds in weight. This he took in his big, red hands, which were numbing in the cold.

For a moment he looked at the fragment of quartz with unbelieving eyes. He wet it with his tongue. Then a something that answered in Jim to excitement pumped from his heart abruptly.

The rock was flecked all through with tiny specks of metal that the miner knew unerringly.

It was gold



THE MAKING OF A CHRISTMAS-TREE

DESPITE the snow that fell that night, despite the near approach of Christmas, old Jim's discovery aroused a great excitement in the camp. That very evening the news was known throughout all Borealis, and all next day, in the driving storm, the hill was visited, the ledge was viewed, and the topic was discussed at length in all its amazing features.

Teamsters, miners, loiterers—all, even including the gambler—came to pay their homage at the hiding-place of one of Mammon's family. All the mountain-side was taken up in claims. The calmest man in all the hills was Jim himself.

Parky made him an offer without the slightest hesitation.

"I'll square off your bill at the store," he said, "and give you a hundred dollars' worth of grub for the claim and prospect just as she stands."

"Not to-day," old Jim replied. "I never do no swapping at the other's feller's terms when I'm busy. We've got to get ready for Christmas, and you don't look to me like Santy Claus hunting 'round for lovely things to do."

"Anyway, I'll send up a lot of grub," declared the gambler, with a wonderful softening of the heart. "I was foolin'—just havin' a joke—the last time you was down to the store. You know you can have the best we've got in the deck."

"Wal, I 'ain't washed the taste of your joke clean out of my mouth just yet, so I won't bother you to-day," drawled Jim; and with muttered curses the gambler left, determined to have that ledge of gold-bearing rock, let the cost be what it might.

"I guess we'll have to quit on that there Christmas-tree," said the blacksmith, who was present with others at the cabin. "Seems

you didn't have time to go to the Pinyon hills and fetch one back."

"If only I hadn't puttered 'round with the work on the claim," said Jim, "we might have had that tree as well as not. But I'll tell you what we can do. We can cut down the alders and willows at the spring, and bind a lot together and tie on some branches of mountain-tea and make a tree. That is, you fellers can, for little Skeezucks ain't a-feelin' right well to-day, and I reckon I'll stay close beside him till he spruces up."

"What about your mine?" inquired Lufkins.

"It ain't agoin' to run away," said the old philosopher, calmly. "I'll let it set there for a few more days, as long as I can't hang it up on the tree. It's just my little present to the boy, anyhow."

If anything had been needed to inject new enthusiasm into the plans for a Christmas celebration or to fire anew the boyhood in the men, the find of gold at Jim's very door would have done the trick a dozen times over.

With hearts new-created for the simple joys of their labor, the big rough fellows cut the meagre growth of leafless trees at the spring in the small ravine, and gathered evergreen mountain-tea that grew in scrawny clusters here and there on the mountains.

Armful after armful of this, their only possible material, they carried to the blacksmith's shop below, and there wrought long and hard and earnestly, tying together the wisps of green and the boughs and trunks of tender saplings.

Four of the stalks, the size of a lady's wrist, they fastened together with twisted wire to form the main support, or body, of their tree. To this the reconstructed, enlarged, and strengthened branches were likewise wired. Lastly, the long, green spikes of the mountain shrub were tied on, in bunches, like so many worn-out brooms. The tree, when completed and standing in its glory in the shop, was a marvellous creation, fully as much like a fir from the forest as a hair-brush is like a palm.

Then began the scheme of its decoration.

One of the geniuses broke up countless bottles, for the red and green glass they afforded, and, tying the pieces in slings of cord, hung them in great profusion from the tree's peculiar arms. From the ceiling of his place of business, Bone, the barkeep, cut down a fluffy lot of colored paper, stuck there in a great rosette, and with this he added much original beauty to the pile. Out of cigar-boxes came a great heap of bright tin-foil that went on the branches in a way that only men could invent.

The carpenter loaded the structure with his gaudy blocks. The man who had promised to make a "kind of kaliderscope" made four or five instead of one. They were white-glass bottles filled with painted pebbles, buttons, dimes, chopped-up pencils, scraps of shiny tin, and anything or everything that would lend confusion or color to the bottle's interior as the thing was rolled about or shaken in the hands. These were so heavy as to threaten the tree's stability. Therefore, they had to be placed about its base on the floor.

The blacksmith had made a lot of little axes, shovels, picks, and hammers, all of which had been filed and polished with the greatest care and affectionate regard for the tiny man whose tree and Christmas all desired to make the finest in the world.

The teamster had evolved, from the inside lining of his winter coat, a hybrid duck-dog-bear that he called a "woolly sheep."

One of the men had whittled out no less than four fat tops, all ringed with colors and truly beautiful to see, that he said were the best he had ever beheld, despite the fact that something was in them that seemed to prevent them from spinning.

Another old fellow brought a pair of rusty skates which were large enough for a six-foot man. He told of the wonderful feats he had once performed on the ice as he hung them on the tree for little Skeezucks.

The envy of all was awakened, however, by Field, the father of the camp, who fetched a drum that would actually make a noise. He had built this wonder out of genuine sheep-skin, stretched over both of the ends

of a bright tin can of exceptional size, from which he had eaten the contents solely with the purpose in view of procuring the metal cylinder.

There were wooden animals, cut-out guns, swords and daggers, wagons—some of them made with spools for wheels—a sled on which the paint was still wet, and dolls suspiciously suggestive of potato-mashers and iron spoons, notwithstanding their clothing. There were balls of every size and color, coins of gold and silver, and books made up of pasted pictures, culled for the greater part from cans of peaches, oysters, tomatoes, lobsters, and salmon.

Nearly every man had fashioned something, and hardly anything had been left unpainted. The clumsy old "boys" of the town had labored with untold patience to perfect their gifts. Their earnestness over the child and the day was a beautiful thing to see. Never were presents more impressive, as to weight. The men had made them splendidly strong.

The gifts had been ticketed variously,

many being marked "For Little Skeezucks," but by far the greatest number bore the inscription: "For Bruvver Jim's Baby—Merry Christmas."

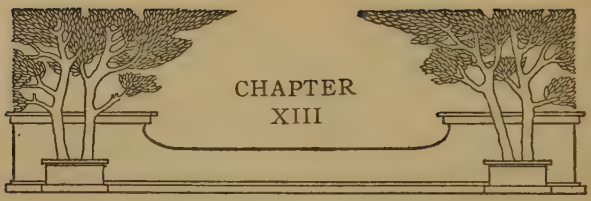
The tree, by the time the things had been lashed upon its branches, needed propping and guying in every direction. The placing of big, white candles upon it, however, strained the skill and self-control of the men to the last degree. If a candle prefers one set of antics to another, that set is certainly embodied in the versatile schemes for lopping over, which the wretched thing will develop on the best-behaving tree in the world. On a home-made tree the opportunities for a candle's enjoyment of this, its most diverting of accomplishments, are increased remarkably. The day was cold, but the men perspired from every pore, and even then the night came on before the work was completed.

When at length they ceased their labors for the day, there was still before them the appalling task of preparing the Christmas banquet.

In the general worry incident to all such preparations throughout the world, Parky, the gambler, fired an unexpected shot. He announced his intention of giving the camp a grand celebration of his own. The "Palace" saloon would be thrown wide open for the holiday, and food, drink, music, and dancing would be the order of the memorable occasion.

"It's a game to knock our tree and banquet into a cocked hat," said the blacksmith, grimly. "Well—he may get some to come, but none of old Jim's friends or the fellers which likes little Skeezucks is goin' to desert our own little festival."

Nevertheless, the glitter of the home-made tree in the dingy shop was dimmed.



THEIR CHRISTMAS-DAY

THE day before Christmas should, by right of delights about to blossom, be nearly as happy as the sweet old carnival itself, but up at the cabin on the hill it was far from being joyous.

The tiny mite of a foundling was not so well as when his friends had left him on the previous afternoon.

He was up and dressed, sitting, in his grave little way, on the miner's knee, weakly holding his crushed-looking doll, but his cold had increased, his sweet baby face was paler, the sad, dumb look in his eyes was deeper in its questioning, the breakfast that the fond old Jim had prepared was quite untasted.

"He ain't agoin' to be right down sick, of course?" said the blacksmith, come to report

all the progress made. "Natchelly, we'd better go on, gittin' ready fer the banquet? He'll be all right fer to-morrow?"

"Oh yes," said Jim. "There never yet was a Christmas that wouldn't get a little youngster well. He'll come to the tree, you bet. It's goin' to be the happiest time he ever had."

Outside, the red-headed Keno was chopping at the brush. The weather was cold and windy, the sky gray and forbidding. When the smith had gone, old Jim, little Skeezucks, and the pup were alone. Tintoretto, the joyous, was prancing about with a boot in his jaws. He stumbled constantly over its bulk, and growled anew at every interference with his locomotion.

"Does little pardner like the pup?" said Jim, patting the sick little man on the back with his clumsy but comforting hand. "Do you want him to come here and play?"

The wee bit of a parentless, deserted boy slowly shook his head.

"Don't you like him any more?" said Jim.

A weak little nod was the answer.

"Is there anything the baby wants?" inquired the miner, tenderly. "What would little Skeezucks like?"

For the very first time since his coming to the camp the little fellow's brown eyes abruptly filled with tears. His tiny lip began to tremble.

"Bruv-ver Jim," he said, and, leaning against the rough old coat of the miner, he cried in his silent way of passionate longing, far too deep in his childish nature for the man to comprehend.

"Poor little man ain't well," said Jim, in a gentle way of soothing. "Bruvver Jim is here all right, and goin' to stay," and, holding the quiet little figure to his heart, he stood up and walked with him up and down the dingy cabin's length, till the shaking little sobs had ceased and the sad little man had gone to sleep.

All day the miner watched the sleeping or the waking of the tiny pilgrim. The men who came to tell of the final completion of the tree and the greater preparations for the feast were assured that the one tiny guest

for whom their labors of love were being expended would surely be ready to enjoy the celebration.

The afternoon gave way to night in the manner common to wintry days. From time to time a gust of wind tore the fleece from the clouds and hurled it in snow upon the silent earth. Dimly the lights of the cabins shone through the darkness and the chill.

At the blacksmith's shop the wind went in as if to warm itself before the forge, only to find it chill and black, wherefore it crept out again at the creaking door. A long, straight pencil of snow was flung through a chink, across the earthen floor and against the swaying Christmas - tree, on which the presents, hanging in readiness for little Skeezucks, beat out a dull, monotonous clatter of tin and wood as they collided in the draught.

The morning—Christmas morning—broke with one bright gleam of sunlight, shining through the leaden banks before the cover of clouds was once more dropped upon the broken rim of mountains all about.

Old Jim was out of his bunk betimes, cooking a breakfast fit, he said, "to tempt a skeleton to feast."

True to his scheme of ensnaring the gray old miner in an idleness with regard to his mine which should soon prove a fatal mistake, Parky, the gambler, had sent a load of the choicest provisions from the store to the cabin on the hill. Only too glad of the daintier morsels thus supplied for his ailing little guest, old Jim had made but feeble protest when the things arrived, and now was preparing a meal from the nicest of the packages.

Little Skeezucks, however, waked in a mood of lethargy not to be fathomed by mere affection. Not only did he turn away at the mere suggestion of eating, but he feebly hid his face and gave a little moan.

"He ain't no better," Jim announced, putting down a breakfast-dish with its cargo quite untasted. "I wish we had a little bit of medicine."

"What kind?" said the worried Keno.

"It wouldn't make much difference," an-

swered the miner. "Anything is medicine that a doctor prescribes, even if it's only sugar-and-water."

"But there ain't a doctor into camp," objected Keno, hauling at his sleeves. "And the one they had in Bullionville has went away, and he was fifty miles from here."

"I know," said Jim.

"You don't think he's sick?" inquired Keno, anxiously.

Jim looked long at his tiny foundling dressed in the nightie that came below his feet. A dull, heavy look was in the little fellow's eyes, half closed and listless.

"He ain't no better," the miner repeated. "I don t know what to do."

Keno hesitated, coughed once or twice, and stirred the fire fiercely before he spoke again. Then he said, "Miss Doc is a sort of female doctor. She knows lots of female things."

"Yes, but she can't work 'em off on the boy," said Jim. "He ain't big enough to stand it."

"No, I don't suppose he is," agreed Keno,

going to the window, on which he breathed, to melt away the frosty foliage of ice. "I think there's some of the boys a-comin'—yep—three or four."

The boots of the men could be heard, as they creaked on the crisply frozen snow, before the visitors arrived at the door. Keno let them in, and with them an oreole of chill and freshness flavored spicily of winter. There were three—the carpenter, Bone, and Lufkins.

"How's the little shaver?" Bone inquired at once.

"About the same," said Jim. "And how's the tree?"

"All ready," answered Lufkins. "Old Webber's got a bully fire, and iron melting hot, to warm the shop. The tree looks great. She's all lit up, and the doors all shut to make it dark, and you bet she's a gem—a gorgeous gem—ain't she, fellers?"

The others agreed that it was.

"And the boys are nearly all on deck," resumed the teamster, "and Webber wanted to know if the morning — Christmas

morning — ain't the time for to fetch the boy."

"Wal, some might think so," Jim replied, unwilling to concede that the tiny man in the bunk was far too ill to join in the cheer so early in the day. "But the afternoon is the regular parliamentary time, and, anyway, little Skeezucks 'ain't had his breakfast, boys, and—we want to be sure the shop is good and warm."

"The boys is all waitin' fer to give three cheers," said the carpenter, "and we're goin' to surprise you with a Christmas song called 'Massa's in the Cole, Cole Ground.'"

"Shut up!" said Bone; "you're givin' it all away. So you won't bring him down this mornin'?"

"Well, we'll tell 'em," agreed the disappointed Lufkins. "What time do you think you'll fetch the little shaver, then, this afternoon?"

"I guess about twelve," said Jim.

"How's he feelin'?" inquired the carpenter.

"Wal, he don't know how to feel on Christ-

mas yet," answered the miner, evasively. "He doesn't know what's a-comin'."

"Wait till he sees them blocks," said the carpenter, with a knowing wink.

"I ain't sayin' nothin'," added Lufkins, with the most significant smile, "but you jest wait."

"Nor me ain't doin' any talkin'," said Bone.

"Well, the boys will all be waitin'," was the teamster's last remark, and slowly down the whitened hill they went, to join their fellows at the shop of the smith.

The big, rough men did wait patiently, expectantly, loyally. Blowing out the candles, to save them for the moment when the tiny child should come, they sat around, or stood about, or wandered back and forth, each togged out in his very best, each with a new touch of Christmas meaning in his heart.

Behind the tree a goodly portion of the banquet was in readiness. Keno's pie was there, together with a mighty stack of doughnuts, plates on plates of pickles, cans of fruit

preserves, a mighty pan of cold baked beans, and a fine array of biscuits big as a man's two fists. From time to time the carpenter, who had saved up his appetite for nearly twenty-four hours, went back to the table and feasted his eyes on the spread. At length he took and ate a pickle. From that, at length, his gaze went longingly to Keno's pie. How one little pie could do any good to a score or so of men he failed to see. At last, in his hunger, he could bear the temptation no longer. He descended on the pie. But how it came to be shied through the window, practically intact, half a moment later, was never explained to the waiting crowd.

By the time gray noon had come across the mountain desolation to the group of little shanties in the snow, old Jim was thoroughly alarmed. Little Skeezucks was helplessly lying in his arms, inert, breathing with difficulty, and now and again moaning, as only a sick little mite of humanity can.

"We can't take him down," said the min-

er, at last. "He ought to have a woman's care."

Keno was startled; his worry suddenly engulfed him.

"What kin we do?" he asked, in helplessness.

"Miss Doc's a decent woman," answered Jim, in despair. "She might know what to do."

"You couldn't bring yourself to that?" asked Keno, thoroughly amazed.

"I could bring myself to anything," said Jim, "if only my little boy could be well and happy."

"Then you ain't agoin' to take him down to the tree?"

"How can I?" answered Jim. "He's awful sick. He needs something more than I can give. He needs—a mother. I didn't know how sick he was gettin'. He won't look up. He couldn't see the tree. He can't be like the most of little kids, for he don't even seem to know it's Christmas."

"Aw, poor little feller!" said Keno. "Jim, what we goin' to do?"

"You go down and ask Miss Doc if I can fetch him there," instructed Jim. "I think she likes him, or she wouldn't have made his little clothes. She's a decent woman, and I know she's got a heart. Go on the run! I'm sorry I didn't give in before."

The fat little Keno ran, in his shirt-sleeves, and without his hat.

Jim was afraid the motionless little foundling was dying in his arms. He could presently wait no longer, either for Keno's return or for anything else. He caught up two of the blankets from the bed, and, wrapping them eagerly, swiftly about the moaning little man, left his cabin standing open and hastened down the white declivity as fast as he could go, Tintoretto, with puppy whinings of concern, closely tagging at his heels.

Lufkins, starting to climb once more to the cabin, beheld him from afar. With all his speed he darted back to the blacksmith-shop and the tree.

"He coming!" he cried, when fifty yards away. "Light the candles—quick!"

In a fever of joy and excitement the rough

fellows lighted up their home-made tree. The forge flung a largess of heat and light, as red as holly, through the gloom of the place. All the men were prepared with a cheer, their faces wreathed with smiles, in a new sort of joy. But the moments sped away in silence and nothing of Jim and the one small cause of their happiness appeared. Indeed, the gray old miner was at Dennihan's already. Keno had met him on the hill with an eager cry that welcome and refuge were gladly prepared.

With her face oddly softened by the news and appeal, Miss Doc herself came running to the gate, her hungry arms outstretched to take the child.

"Just make him well," was Jim's one cry. "I know a woman can make him well."

And all afternoon the men at the blacksmith's-shop kept up their hope. Keno had come to them, telling of the altered plans by which little Skeezucks had found his way to Miss Doc, but by special instruction he added that Jim was certain that improvement was coming already.

"He told me that evenin' is the customary hour fer to have a tree, anyhow," concluded Keno, hopefully. "He says he was off when he said to turn it loose at noon."

"Does he think Miss Doc can git the little feller fixed all up to celebrate to-night?" inquired Bone. "Is that the bill of fare?"

"That's about it," said Keno, importantly. "I'm to come and let you know when we're ready."

Impatient for the night to arrive, excited anew, when at last it closed in on the world of snow and mountains, the celebrators once more gathered at the shop and lighted up their tree. The wind was rushing brusquely up the street; the snow began once more to fall. From the "Palace" saloon came the sounds of music, laughter, song, and revelry. Light streamed forth from the window in glowing invitation. All day long its flow of steaming drinks and its endless succession of savory dishes had laded the air with temptation.

Not a few of the citizens of Borealis had succumbed to the gayer attractions of Parky's

festival, but the men who had builded a Christmas-tree and loaded its branches with presents waited and waited for tiny Skeezucks in the dingy shop.

The evening passed. Night aged in the way that wintry storm and lowering skies compel. Dismally creaked the door on its rusted hinges. Into the chink shot the particles of snow, and formed again that icy mark across the floor of the shop. One by one the candles burned away on the tree, gave a gasp, a flare, and expired.

Silently, loyally the group of big, rough miners and toilers sat in the cheerless gloom, hearing that music, in its soullessness, come on the gusts of the storm—waiting, waiting for their tiny guest.

At length a single candle alone illumined their pitiful tree, standing with its meagre branches of greenery stiffly upheld on its scrawny frame, while the darkness closed sombrely in upon the glint of the toys they had labored to make.

Then finally Keno came, downcast, pale, and worried.

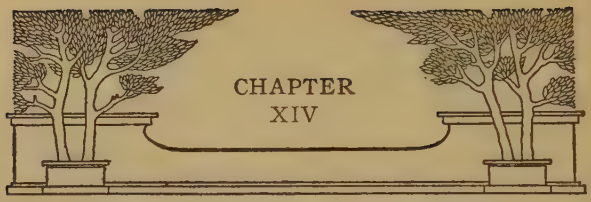
"The little feller's awful sick," he said. "I guess he can't come to the tree."

His statement was greeted in silence.

"Then, maybe he'll see it to-morrow," said the blacksmith, after a moment. "It wouldn't make so very much odds to us old cusses. Christmas is for kids, of course. So we'll leave her standing jest as she is."

Slowly they gave up their final hopes. Slowly they all went out in the storm and night, shutting the door on the Christmas celebration now abandoned to darkness, the creak of the hinges, the long line of snow inside that pointed to the tree.

One by one they bade good-night to Webber, the smith, and so went home to many a cold little cabin, seemingly hunched like a freezing thing in the driving storm.



"IF ONLY I HAD THE RESOLUTION"

FOR the next three or four days the tiny bit of a man at Miss Doc's seemed neither to be worse nor better of his ailment. The hand of lethargy lay with dulling weight upon him. Old Jim and Miss Dennihan were baffled, though their tenderness increased and their old animosity disappeared, forgotten in the stress of care.

That the sister of Doc could develop such a spirit of motherhood astounded nearly every man in the camp. Accustomed to acerbities of criticism for their many shortcomings from her ever-pointed tongue, they marvelled the more at her semi-partnership with Jim, whom of all the population of the town she had scorned and verbally castigated most frequently.

Resupplying their tree with candles, the patient fellows had kept alive their hope of a great day of joy and celebration, only to see it steadily receding from their view. At length they decided to carry their presents to the house where the wan little foundling lay, trusting the sight of their labors of love might cheer him to recovery.

To the utter amazement of her brother, Miss Doc not only permitted the big, rough men to track the snow through her house, when they came with their gifts, but she gave them kindly welcome. In her face that day they readily saw some faint, illusive sign of beauty heretofore unnoticed, or perhaps concealed.

"He'll come along all right," she told them, with a smile they found to be singularly sweet, "for Jim do seem a comfort to the poor little thing."

Old Jim would surely have been glad to believe that he or anything supplied a comfort to the grave little sick man lying so quietly in bed. The miner sat by him all day long, and far into every night, only climb-

ing to his cabin on the hill when necessity drove him away. Then he was back there in the morning by daylight, eager, but cheerful always.

The presents were heaped on the floor in sight of the pale little Skeezucks, who clung unfailingly, through it all, to the funny makeshift of a doll that "Bruvver Jim" had placed in his keeping. He appeared not at all to comprehend the meaning of the gifts the men had brought, or to know their purpose. That never a genuinely happy Christmas had brightened his little, mysterious life, Miss Dennihan knew by a swift, keen process of womanly intuition.

"I wisht he wasn't so sad," she said, from time to time. "I expect he's maybe pinin'."

On the following day there came a change. The little fellow tossed in his bed with a fever that rose with every hour. With eyes now burning bright, he scanned the face of the gray old miner and begged for "Bruvver Jim."

"This is Bruvver Jim," the man assured him repeatedly. "What does baby want old Jim to do?"

"Bruv-ver—Jim," came the half-sobbed little answer. "Bruv-ver—Jim."

Jim took him up and held him fast in his arms. The weary little mind had gone to some tragic baby past.

"No-body—wants me—anywhere," he said.

The heart in old Jim was breaking. He crooned a hundred tender declarations of his foster-parenthood, of his care, of his wish to be a comfort and a "pard."

But something of the fever now had come between the tiny ears and any voice of tenderness.

"Bruv-ver—Jim; Bruv-ver—Jim," the little fellow called, time and time again.

With the countless remedies which her lore embraced, the almost despairing Miss Doc attempted to allay the rising fever. She made little drinks, she studied all the bottles in her case of simples with unremitting attention.

Keno, the always-faithful, was sent to every house in camp, seeking for anything and everything that might be called a medi-

cine. It was all of no avail. By the time another day had dawned little Skeezucks was flaming hot with the fever. He rolled his tiny body in baby delirium, his feeble little call for "Bruvver Jim" endlessly repeated, with his sad little cry that no one wanted him anywhere in the world.

In his desperation, Jim was undergoing changes. His face was haggard; his eyes were ablaze with parental anguish.

"I know a shrub the Injuns sometimes use for fever," he said to Miss Doc, at last, when he suddenly thought of the aboriginal medicine. "It grows in the mountains. Perhaps it would do him good."

"I don't know," she answered, at the end of her resources, and she clasped her hands. "I don't know."

"If only I can git a horse," said Jim, "I might be able to find the shrub."

He waited, however, by the side of the moaning little pilgrim.

Then, half an hour later, Bone, the barkeep, came up to see him, in haste and ex-

citement. They stood outside, where the visitor had called him for a talk.

"Jim," said Bone, "you're in fer trouble. Parky is goin' to jump your claim to-night —it bein' New Year's eve, you know—at twelve o'clock. He told me so himself. He says you 'ain't done assessment, nor you can't —not now—and you 'ain't got no more right than anybody else to hold the ground. And so he's meanin' to slap a new location on the claim the minute this here year is up."

"Wal, the little feller's awful sick," said Jim. "I'm thinkin' of goin' up in the mountains for some stuff the Injuns sometimes use for fever."

"You can't go and leave your claim unprotected," said Bone.

"How did Parky happen to tell you his intentions?" said Jim.

"He wanted me to go in with him," Bone replied, flushing hotly at the bare suggestion of being involved in a trick so mean. "He made me promise, first, I wouldn't give the game away, but I've got to tell it to you. I

couldn't stand by and see you lose that gold-ledge now."

"To-morrow is New Year's, sure enough," Jim replied, reflectively. "That mine belongs to little Skeezucks."

"But Parky's goin' to jump it, and he's got a gang of toughs to back him up."

"I'd hate to lose it, Bone. It would seem hard," said Jim. "But I ought to go up in the hills to find that shrub. If only I had a horse, I could go and git back in time to watch the claim."

Bone was clearly impatient.

"Don't git down to the old 'if only' racket now," he said, with heat. "I busted my word to warn you, Jim, and the claim is worth a fortune to you and little Skeezucks."

Jim's eyes took on a look of pain.

"But, Bone, if he don't git well," he said —"if he don't git well, think how I'd feel! Couldn't you get me a horse? If only—"

"Hold on," interrupted Bone, "I'll do all I kin for the poor little shaver, but I don't expect I can git no horse. I'll go and see, but the teams has all got the extry stock

in harness, fer the roads is mighty tough, and snow, down the cañon, is up to the hubs of the wheels. You've got to be back before too late or your claim goes up, fer, Jim, you know as well as me that Parky's got the right of law!"

"If only I could git that shrub," said Jim, as his friend departed, and back to the tossing little man he went, worried to the last degree.

Bone was right. The extra horses were all in requisition to haul the ore to the quartz-mill through a stretch of ten long miles of drifted snow. Moreover, Jim had once too often sung his old "if-only" cry. The men of Borealis smiled sadly, as they thought of tiny Skeezucks, but with doubt of Jim, whose resolutions, statements, promises, had long before been estimated at their final worth.

"There ain't no horse he could have," said Lufkins, making ready himself to drive his team of twenty animals through wind and snow to the mill, "and even if we had a mule, old Jim would never start. It's comin' on to

snow again to-night, and that's too much for Jim."

Bone was not at once discouraged, but in truth he believed, with all the others, that Jim would no more leave the camp to go forth and breast the oncoming snow to search the mountains for a shrub than he would fetch a tree for the Christmas celebration or work good and hard at his claim.

The bar-keep found no horse. He expected none to be offered, and felt his labors were wasted. The afternoon was well advanced when he came again to the home of Miss Doc, where Jim was sitting by the bed whereon the little wanderer was burning out his life.

"Jim," he said, in his way of bluntness, "there ain't no horse you can git, but I warned you 'bout the claim, and I don't want to see you lose it, all fer nothin'."

"He's worse," said Jim, his eyes wildly blazing with love for the fatherless, motherless little man. "If only I had the resolution, Bone, I'd go and git that shrub on foot."

"You'd lose yer claim," said Bone.

Miss Doc came out to the door where they stood. She was wringing her hands.

"Jim," she said, "if you think you kin, anyhow, git that Injun stuff, why don't you go and git it?"

Jim looked at her fixedly. Not before had he known that she felt the case to be so nearly hopeless. Despair took a grip on his vitals. A something of sympathy leaped from the woman's heart to his — a something common to them both—in the yearning that a helpless child had stirred.

"I'll get my hat and go," he said, and he went in the house, to appear almost instantly, putting on the battered hat, but clothed far too thinly for the rigors of the weather.

"But, Jim, it's beginning to snow, right now," objected Bone.

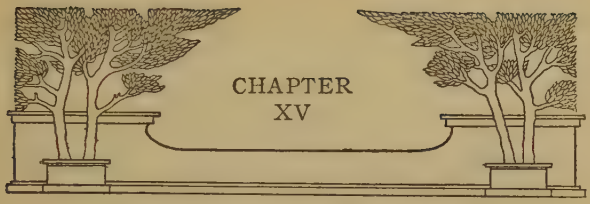
"I may get back before it's dark," old Jim replied.

"I can see you're goin' to lose the claim," insisted Bone.

"I'm goin' to git that shrub!" said Jim. "I won't come back till I git that shrub."

He started off through the gate at the back

of the house, his long, lank figure darkly cut against the background of the white that lay upon the slope. A flurry of blinding snow came suddenly flying on the wind. It wrapped him all about and hid him in its fury, and when the calmer falling of the flakes commenced he had disappeared around the shoulder of the hill.



THE GOLD IN BOREALIS

THE men to whom the bar-keep told the story of Jim and his start into the mountains smiled again. The light in their eyes was half of affection and half of concern. They could not believe the shiftless old miner would long remain away in the snow and wind, where more than simple resolution was required to keep a man afoot. They would see him back before the darkness settled on the world, perhaps with something in his hand by way of a weed, if not precisely the "Injun" thing he sought.

But the darkness came and Jim was not at hand. The night and the snow seemed swirling down together in the gorge, from every lofty uprise of the hills. It was not

so cold as the previous storm, yet it stung with its biting force.

At six o'clock the blacksmith called at the Dennihans', in some anxiety. Doc himself threw open the door, in response to the knock. How small and quiet he appeared, here at home!

"No, he 'ain't showed up," he said of Jim. "I don't know when he'll come."

Webber reported to the boys.

"Well, mebbe he's gone, after all," said Field.

"He looked kind of funny 'round the eyes when he started," Bone informed them. "I hope he'll git his stuff," and they wandered down the street again.

At eight o'clock the bar-keep returned once more to Miss Doc's.

No Jim was there. The sick little foundling was feebly calling in his baby way for "Bruvver Jim."

The fever had him in its furnace. Restlessly, but now more weakly weaving, the tiny bit of a man continued as ever to cling to his doll, which he held to his breast with

all that remained of his strength. It seemed as if his tired baby brain was somehow aware that Jim was gone, for he begged to have him back in a sweet little way of entreaty, infinitely sad.

"Bruvver Jim?" he would say, in his questioning little voice—"Bruvver Jim?" And at last he added, "Bruvver Jim—do—yike—'ittle Nu—thans."

At this Miss Doc felt her heart give a stroke of pain, for something that was almost divination of things desolate in the little fellow's short years of babyhood was granted to her woman's understanding.

"Bruvver Jim will come," she said, as she knelt beside the bed. "He'll come back home to the baby."

But nine o'clock and ten went by, and only the storm outside came down from the hills to the house.

Hour after hour the lamp was burning in the window as a beacon for the traveller; hour after hour Miss Dennihan watched the fever and the weary little fellow in its toils. At half-past ten the blacksmith, the carpen-

ter, and Keno came, Tintoretto, the pup, coldly trembling at their heels. Jim was not yet back, and the rough men made no concealment of their worry.

"Not home?" said Webber. "Out in the hills—in this?"

"You don't s'pose mebbe he's lost?" inquired the carpenter.

"No, Jim knows his mountains," replied the smith, "but any man could fall and break his leg or somethin'."

"I wisht he'd come," said Miss Doc. "I wisht that he was home."

The three men waited near the house for half an hour more, but in vain. It was then within an hour of midnight. Slowly, at last, they turned away, but had gone no more than half a dozen rods when they met the bar-keep, Doc Dennihan, Lufkins the teamster, and four other men of the camp, who were coming to see if Jim had yet returned.

"I thought he mebbe hadn't come," said Bone, when Webber gave his report, "but Parky's goin' to try to jump his claim at twelve o'clock, and we ain't goin' fer to stand

it! Come on down to my saloon fer extry guns and ammunition. We're soon goin' up on the hill to hold the ledge fer Jim and the poor little kid."

With ominous coupling of the gambler's name with rough and emphatic language, the ten men marched in a body down the street.

The wind was howling, a door of some deserted shed was dully, incessantly slamming.

Helplessly Miss Dennihan sat by the bed whereon the tiny pilgrim lay, now absolutely motionless. The fever had come to its final stage. Dry of skin, burning through and through, his little mouth parched despite the touch of cooling water on his lips, the wee mite of a man without a name, without a home, or a mother, or a single one of the baby things that make the little folks so joyous, had ceased to struggle, and ceased at last to call for "Bruvver Jim."

Then, at a quarter-past eleven, the outside door was suddenly thrown open, and in there staggered Jim, a haggard, wild-eyed being, ghastly white, utterly exhausted, and holding in his hand a wretched, scrawny branch

of the mountain shrub he had gone to seek.

"Oh, Jim! Jim!" cried Miss Doc, and, running forward, she threw her arm around his waist to keep him up, for she thought he must fall at every step.

"He's — alive?" he asked her, hoarsely. "He's alive? I only asked to have him wait! Hot water!—get the stuff in water—quick!" and he thrust the branch into her hand.

Beside the bed, on his great, rough knees, he fairly fell, crooning incoherently, and by a mighty effort keeping his stiff, cold hands from the tiny form.

Miss Doc had kept a plate of biscuit warm in the stove. One of these and a piece of meat she gave to the man, bidding him eat it for the warmth his body required.

"Fix the shrub in the water," he begged.

"It's nearly ready now," she answered. "Take a bite to eat."

Then, presently, she came again to his side. "I've got the stuff," she said, awed by the look of anguish on the miner's face, and into his hands she placed a steaming pitcher, a

cup, and a spoon, after which she threw across his shoulders a warm, thick blanket, dry and comforting.

Already the shrub had formed a dark, pungent liquor of the water poured upon it. Turning out a cupful in his haste, old Jim flowed the scalding stuff across his hands. It burned, but he felt no pain. The spoonful that he dipped from the cup he placed to his own cold lips, to test. He blew upon it as a mother might, and tried it again.

Then tenderly he fed the tea through the dry little lips. Dully the tiny man's unseeing eyes were fixed on his face.

"Take it, for old Bruvver Jim," the man gently coaxed, and spoonful after spoonful, touched every time to his own mouth first, to try its heat, he urged upon the little patient.

Then Miss Doc did a singular thing. She put on a shawl and, abruptly leaving the house, ran with all her might down the street, through the snow, to Bone's saloon. For the very first time in her life she entered this detested place, a blazing light of joy in her

eyes. Six of the men, about to join the four already gone to the hill above, where Jim had found the gold, were about to leave for the claim.

"He's come!" cried Miss Doc. "He's home—and got the weed! I thought you boys would like to know!"

Then backing out, with a singular smile upon her face, she hastened to return to her home with all the speed the snow would permit.

Alone in the house with the silent little pilgrim, who seemed beyond all human aid, the gray old miner knew not what he should do. The shrub tea was failing, it seemed to him. The sight of the drooping child was too much to be borne. The man threw back his head as he knelt there on the floor, and his stiffened arms were appealingly uplifted in prayer.

"God Almighty," he said, in his broken voice of entreaty, "don't take this little boy away from me! Let him stay. Let him stay with me and the boys. You've got so many little youngsters there. For Christ's sake, let me have this one!"

When Miss Doc came quietly in, old Jim had not apparently moved. He was once more dipping the pungent liquor from the cup and murmuring words of endearment and coaxing, to the all-unhearing little patient. The eager woman took off her shawl and stood behind him, watching intently.

"Oh, Jim!" she said, from time to time—"oh, Jim!"

With a new supply of boiling water, constantly heated on her stove, she kept the steaming concoction fresh and hot.

Midnight came. The New Year was blown across those mighty peaks in storm and fury. Presently out of the howling gale came the sound of half a dozen shots, and then of a fusillade. But Jim, if he heard them, did not guess the all they meant to him.

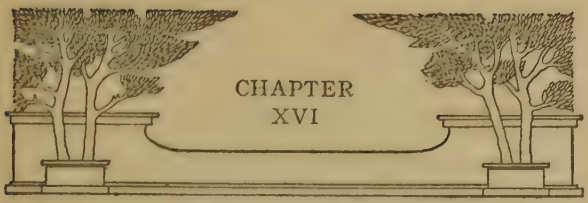
For an hour he had only moved his hands to take the pitcher, or to put it down, or to feed the drink to the tiny foundling, still so motionless and dull with the fever.

One o'clock was finally gone, and two, and three. Jim and the yearning Miss Doc still battled on, like two united parents.

Then at last the miner made a half-stifled sound in his throat.

"You—can go and git a rest," he said, brokenly. "The sweat has come."

All night the wind and the storm continued. All through the long, long darkness, the bitter cold and snow were searching through the hills. But when, at last, the morning broke, there on the slope, where old Jim's claim was staked, stood ten grim figures, white with snow, and scattered here and there around the ledge of gold. They were Bone and Webber, Keno and Field, Doc Dennihan, the carpenter, the teamster, and other rough but faithful men who had guarded the claim against invasion in the night.



ARRIVALS IN CAMP

THERE is something fine in a party of men when no one brags of a fight brought sternly to victory.

Parky, the gambler, was badly shot through the arm; Bone, the bar-keep, had a long, straight track through his hair, cleaned by a ball of lead. And this was deemed enough of a story when the ten half-frozen men had secured the claim to Jim and his that New-Year's morning.

But the camp regretted on the whole that, instead of being shelved at his house, the gambler had not been slain.

For nearly a week the wan little foundling, emerging from the vale of shadows at the home of Miss Dennihan, lay as if debating, in his grave, baby way, the pros and cons

of existence. And even when, at last, he was well on the road to recovery, he somehow seemed more quiet than ever before.

The rough old "boys" of the town could not, by any process of their fertile brains, find an adequate means of expressing their relief and delight when they knew at last the quaint little fellow was again himself.

They came to Miss Dennihan's in groups with brand-new presents and with wonderful spirits. They played on the floor like so many well-meaning bears; they threatened to fetch their poor, neglected Christmas-tree from the blacksmith-shop; they urged Miss Doc to start a candy-pull, a night-school, a dancing-class, and a game of blindman's-buff forthwith. Moreover, not a few discovered traces of beauty and sweetness in the face of the formerly plain, severe old maid, and slyly one or two began a species of courtship.

On all their manœuvres the little convalescent looked with grave curiosity. Such antics he had surely never seen. Pale and silent, as he sat on Jim's big knee one even-

ing, he watched the men intently, their crude attempts at his entertainment furnishing an obvious puzzle to his tiny mind. Then presently he looked with wonder and awe at the presents, unable to understand that all this wealth of bottles, cubes, tops, balls, and wagons was his own.

The carpenter was spelling "cat" and "dog" and "Jim" with the blocks, while Field was rolling the balls on the floor and others were demonstrating the beauties and functions of kaleidoscopes and endless other offerings; but through it all the pale little guest of the camp still held with undiminished fervor to the doll that Jim had made when first he came to Borealis.

"We'd ought to git up another big Christmas," said the blacksmith, standing with his arms akimbo. "He didn't have no holidays worth a cent."

"We could roll 'em all into one," suggested Field—"Christmas, New Year's, St. Valentine's, and Fourth of July."

"What's the matter with Washington's birthday?" Bone inquired.

"And mine?" added Keno, pulling down his sleeves. "By jinks! it comes next week."

"Aw, you never had a birthday," answered the teamster. "You was jest mixed up and baked, like gingerbread."

"Or a lemon pie," said the carpenter, with obvious sarcasm.

"Wal, holidays are awful hard for some little folks to digest," said Jim. "I'm kind of scared to see another come along."

"I should think to-night is pretty near holiday enough," said the altered Miss Doc. "Our little boy has come 'round delightful."

"Kerrect," said Bone. "But if us old cusses could see him sort of laughin' and crowin' it would do us heaps of good."

"Give him time," said the teamster. "Some of the sickenest crowin' I ever heard was let out too soon."

The carpenter said, "You jest leave him alone with these here blocks for a day or two, if you want to hear him laugh."

"'Ain't we all laughed at them things enough to suit you yit?" inquired Bone.

"Some people would want you to laugh at their funeral, I reckon."

"Wal, laughin' ain't everything there is worth the havin'," Jim drawled. "Some people's laughin' has made me ashamed, and some has made me walk with a limp, and some has made me fightin' mad. When little Skeezucks starts it off — I reckon it's goin' to make me a boy again, goin' in swimmin' and eatin' bread-and-molasses."

For the next few days, however, Jim and the others were content to see the signs of returning baby strength that came to little Skeezucks. That the clearing away of the leaden clouds, and the coming of beauty and sunshine, pure and dazzling, had a magical effect upon the tiny chap, as well as on themselves, the men were all convinced. And the camp, one afternoon, underwent a wholly novel and unexpected sensation of delight.

A man, with his sweet, young wife and three small, bright-faced children, came driving to Borealis. With two big horses steaming in the crystal air and blowing great, white clouds of mist from their nostrils, with wheels

rimmed deeply by the snow between the spokes, with colored wraps and mittened hands, and three red worsted caps upon the children's heads, the vision coming up the one straight street was quite enough to warm up every heart in town.

The rig drew up in front of the blacksmith-shop, and twenty men came walking there to give it welcome.

"Howdy, stranger?" said the blacksmith, as he came from his forge, bareheaded, his leathern apron tied about his waist, his sleeves rolled up, and his big, hairy arms akimbo. "Pleasant day. You're needin' somethin' fixed, I see," and he nodded quietly towards a road-side job of mending at the double-tree, which was roughly wrapped about with rope.

"Yes. Good-morning," said the driver of the rig, a clear-eyed, wholesome-looking man of clerical appearance. "We had a little accident. We've come from Bullionville. How long do you think it will take you to put us in shape?"

The smith was looking at the children.

Such a trio of blue-eyed, rosy-cheeked, unalarmed little girls had never before been seen in Borealis; and they all looked back at him and the others with the most engaging frankness.

"Well, about how far you goin'?" said the smith, by way of answer.

"To Fremont," replied the stranger. "I'm a preacher, but they thought they couldn't support a church at Bullionville," he added, with a look, half mirth, half worry, in his eyes. "However, a man from Fremont loaned us the horses and carriage, so we thought we'd move before the snow fell any deeper. I'd like to go on without great delay, if the mending can be hastened."

"Your off horse needs shoein'," said Webber, quickly scanning every detail of the animals and vehicle with his practised eye. "It's a long pull to Fremont. I reckon you can't git started before the day after tomorrow."

To a preacher who had found himself superfluous, the thought of the bill of expenses that would heap up so swiftly here in Bor-

ealis was distressing. He was poor; he was worried. Like many of the miners, he had worked at a claim that proved to be worthless in the end.

"I—hoped it wouldn't take so long," he answered, slowly, "but then I suppose we shall be obliged to make the best of the situation. There are stables where I can put up the horses, of course?"

"You kin use two stalls of mine," said the teamster, who liked the looks of the three little girls as well as those of the somewhat shy little mother and the preacher himself. "Boys, unhitch his stock."

Field, Bone, and the carpenter, recently made tender over all of youngster-kind, proceeded at once to unfasten the harness.

"But—where are we likely to find accommodations?" faltered the preacher, doubtfully. "Is there any hotel or boarding-house in camp?"

"Well, not exactly — is there, Webber?" replied the teamster. "The boardin'-house is over to the mill—the quartz-mill, ten miles down the cañon."

"But I reckon they could stop at Doc's," replied the smith, who had instantly determined that three bright-eyed little girls in red worsted caps should not be permitted to leave Borealis without a visit first to Jim and tiny Skeezucks. "Miss Doc could sure make room, even if Doc had to bunk up at Jim's. One of you fellers jest run up and ask her, quick! And, anyway," he added, "Mr. Preacher, you and the three little girls ought to see our little boy."

Field, who had recently developed a tender admiration for the heretofore repellent Miss Doc, started immediately.

He found old Jim and the pup already at the house where the tiny, pale little Skeezucks still had domicile. Quickly relating the news of the hour, the messenger delivered his query as to room to be had, in one long gasp of breath.

Miss Doc flushed prettily, to think of entertaining a preacher and his family. The thought of the three little girls set her heart to beating in a way she could not take the time to analyze.

"Of course, they kin come, and welcome," she said. "I'll give 'em all a bite to eat directly, but I don't jest see where I'll put so many. If John and the preacher could both go up on the hill with you, Jim, I 'low I could manage."

"Room there for six," said Jim, who felt some singular stirring of excitement in his veins at the thought of having the grave little foundling meet three other children here in the camp. "I'd give him a bunk if Keno and me had to take to the floor."

"All right, I'll skedaddle right back there, lickety-split, and let 'em know," said Field. "I knowed you'd do it, Miss Doc," and away he went.

By the time he returned to the blacksmith-shop the horses were gone to the stable, and all the preacher's family and all their bundles were out of the carriage. What plump-legged, healthy, inquisitive youngsters those three small girls appeared as they stood there in the snow.

"All right!" said Field, as he came to the group, where everybody seemed already ac-

quainted and friendly. "Fixed up royal, and ye're all expected right away."

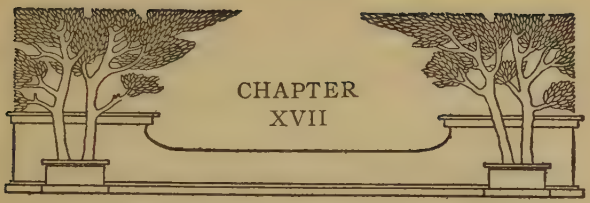
"We couldn't leave the little gals to walk," said the blacksmith. "I'll carry this one myself," and, taking the largest of the children in his big, bare arms, he swung her up with a certain gesture of yearning not wholly under control.

"And I'll—"

"And I'll—" came quickly from the group, while six or eight big fellows suddenly jostled each other in their haste to carry a youngster. There being but two remaining, however, only two of the men got prizes, and Field felt particularly injured because he had earned such an honor, he felt, by running up to Doc's to make arrangements. He and several others were obliged to be contented with the bundles, not a few of which were threatened with destruction in the eagerness of all to be of use.

But presently everything was adjusted, and, deserting the carriage, the shop, and everything else, the whole assemblage moved in procession on the home of the Dennihans.

A few minutes later little Skeezucks, Jim, and the pup—all of them looking from the window of the house—saw those three small caps of red, and felt that New-Year's day had really come at last.



SKEEZUCKS GETS A NAME

WHEN the three small girls, so rosy of cheek and so sparkling of eye, confronted the grave little pilgrim he could only gaze upon them with timid yearning as he clung to his doll and to old "Bruvver Jim." There never had been in all his life a vision so beautiful. Old Jim himself was affected almost as much as the quaint, wee man so quietly standing at his side. Even Tintoretto was experiencing ecstasies heretofore unknown in his youthful career.

Indeed, no one could have determined by any known system of calculation whether Jim or tiny Skeezucks or the pup most enjoyed the coming of the preacher and his family. Old Jim had certainly never before undergone emotions so deeply stirring. Tin-

toretto had never before beheld four youngsters affording such a wealth of opportunity for puppy-wise manœuvres; indeed, he had never before seen but one little playfellow since his advent in the world. He was fairly crazed with optimism. As for Skeezucks—starving for even so much as the sight of children, hungering beyond expression for the sound of youngster voices, for the laughter and over-bubblings of the little folk with whom by rights he belonged—nothing in the way of words will ever tell of the almost overpowering excitement and joy that presently leaped in his lonely little heart.

Honesty is the children's policy. There was nothing artificial in the way those little girls fell in love with tiny Skeezucks; and with equally engaging frankness the tiny man instantly revealed his fondness for them all.

They were introduced as Susie and Rachie and Ellie. Their other name was Stowe. This much being soon made known, the three regarded their rights to the house, to little Skeezucks, and to Tintoretto as established. They secured the pup by two of his

paws and his tail, and, with him thus in hand, employed him to assist in surrounding tiny Skeezucks, whom they promptly kissed and adopted.

"Girls," said the father, mildly, "don't be rude."

"They're all right," drawled Jim, in a new sort of pleasure. "There are some kinds of rudeness a whole lot nicer than politeness."

"What's his name?" said Susie, lifting her piquant little face up to Jim, whom all the Stowe family had liked at once "Has he got any name?"

In a desperate groping for his inspiration, Jim thought instantly of all his favorites—Diogenes, Plutarch, Endymion, Socrates, Kit Carson, and Daniel Boone.

"Wal, yes. His name—" and there old Jim halted, while "Di" and "Plu" and "Indy" and "Soc" all clamored in his brain for the honor "His name— I reckon his name is Carson Boone."

"Little Carson," said Rachie "Isn't Carson a sweet little boy, mammy? What's he got—a rabbit?"

"That's his doll," said Jim.

"Oh, papa, look!" said Rachie.

"Oh, papa, look!" echoed Susie.

"Papa, yook!" piped Ellie, the youngest, who wanted the dolly for herself, and, therefore, hauled at it lustily.

The others endeavored to prevent her depredations. Between them they tore the precious creation from the hands of the tiny man, and released the pup, who immediately leaped up and fastened a hold on the doll himself, to the horror of the preacher, Miss Doc, old Jim, Mrs Stowe, and Skeezucks, all of whom, save the newly christened little Carson, pounced upon the children, the doll, and Tintoretto, with one accord. And there is nothing like a pounce upon a lot of children or a pup to make folks well acquainted.

Her "powder-flask" ladyship being duly rescued, her raiment smoothed, and her head readjusted on her body, the three small, healthy girls were perpetually enjoined from another such exhibition of coveting their neighbor's doll, whereupon all conceived that new diversion must be forthwith invented.

"You can have a lot of fun with all them Christmas presents in the corner," Jim informed them, in the great relief he felt himself to see the quaint little foundling once more in undisputed possession of his one beloved toy. "They 'ain't got any feelin's."

Miss Doc had carefully piled the presents in a tidy pyramid against the wall, in the corner designated, after which she had covered the pile with a sheet. This sheet came off in a hurry. The pup filled his mouth with a yard of the white material, and, growling in joy, shook it madly and raced away with it streaming in his wake. Miss Doc and Mrs. Stowe gave chase immediately. Tintoretto tripped at once, but even when the women had caught the sheet in their hands he hung on prodigiously, and shook the thing, and growled and braced his weight against their strength, to the uncontainable delight of all the little Stowe contingent.

Then they fell on the presents, to which they conveyed little Carson, in the intimate way of hugging in transit that only small

mothers-to-be have ever been known to develop.

"Oh, papa, look at the funny old bottle!" said Susie, taking up one of the "sort of kaliderscopes" in her hand.

"Papa, mamma, look!" added Rachie.

"Papa—yook!" piped Ellie, as before, laying violent hands of possession on the toy.

"You can have it," said Susie; "I'm goin' to have the red wagon."

"Oh, papa, look at the pretty red wagon!" said Rachie, dropping another of the kaleidoscopes with commendable promptness.

"Me!—yed yaggon!" cried Ellie.

"Children, children!" said the preacher, secretly amused and entertained. "Don't you know the presents all belong to little Carson?"

"Well, we didn't get anything but mittens and caps," said Rachie, in the baldest of candor.

"Go ahead and enjoy the things," instructed Jim. "Skeezucks, do you want the little girls to play with all the things?"

The little fellow nodded. He was happier far than ever he had been in all his life.

"But they ought to play with one thing at a time, and not drop one after another," said the mild Mrs. Stowe, blushing girlishly.

"I like to see them practise at changin' their minds," drawled the miner, philosophically. "I'd be afraid of a little gal that didn't begin to show the symptoms."

But all three of the bright-eyed embryos of motherhood had united on a plan. They sat the grave little Carson in the red-painted wagon, with his doll held tightly to his heart, and began to haul him about.

Tintoretto, who had dragged off an alphabetical block, was engrossed in the task of eating off and absorbing the paint and elements of education, with a gusto that savored of something that might and might not have been ambition. He abandoned this at once, however, to race beside or behind or before the wagon, and to help in the pulling by laying hold of any of the children's dresses that came most readily within reach of his jaws.

The ride became a romp, for the pup was barking, the wheels were creaking, and the

three small girls were crying out and laughing at the tops of their voices. They drew their royal coach through every room in the house—which rooms were five in number—and then began anew.

Back and forth and up and down they hastened, the pup and tiny Skeezucks growing more and more delighted as their lively little friends alternately rearranged him, kissed him, crept on all fours beside him, and otherwise added adornments to the pageant. In an outburst of enthusiasm, Tintoretto made a gulp at the off hind-wheel of the wagon, and, sinking his teeth in the wood thereof, not only prevented its revolutions, but braced so hard that the smallest girl, who was pulling at the moment, found herself suddenly stalled. To her aid her two sturdy little sisters darted, and the three gave a mighty tug, to haul the pup and all.

But the unexpected happened. The wheel came off. The pup let out a yell of consternation and turned a back somersault; the three little Stowes went down in a heap of legs and heads, while the wagon lurched

abruptly and gave the tiny passenger a jolt that astonished him mightily. The three small girls scrambled to their feet, awed into silence by their breaking of the wagon.

For a moment the hush was impressive. Then the gravity began to go from the face of little Carson. Something was dancing in his eyes. His quaint little face wrinkled oddly in mirth. His head went back, and the sweetest conceivable chuckle of baby laughter came from his lips. Like joy of bubbling water in a brook, it rippled in music never before awakened. Old Jim and Miss Doc looked at each other in complete amazement, but the little fellow laughed and laughed and laughed. His heart was overflowing, suddenly, with all the laughing and joy that had never before been invited to his heart. The other youngsters joined him in his merriment, and so did the preacher and pretty Mrs. Stowe; and so did Jim and Miss Doc, but these two laughed with tears warmly welling from their eyes.

It seemed as if the fatherless and motherless little foundling laughed for all the days

and weeks and months of sadness gone beyond his baby recall. And this was the opening only of his frolic and fun with the children. They kissed him in fondness, and planted him promptly in a second of the wagons. They knew a hundred devices for bringing him joy and merriment, not the least important of which was the irresistible march of destruction on the rough-made Christmas treasures.

That evening a dozen rough and awkward men of the camp came casually in to visit Miss Doc, whose old-time set of thoughts and ideas had been shattered, till in sheer despair of getting them all in proper order once again she let them go and joined in the general outbreak of amusement.

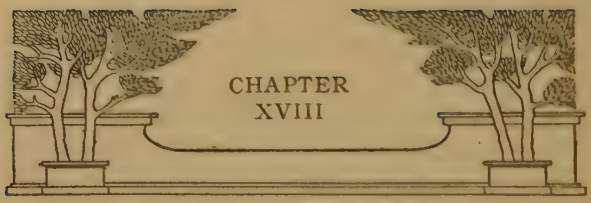
There were games of hide-and-seek, in which the four happy children and the men all joined with equal irresponsibility, and games of blindman's-buff, that threatened the breaking to pieces of the house. Through it all, old Jim and the preacher, Mrs. Stowe and Miss Doc were becoming more and more friendly.

At last the day and the evening, too, were gone. The tired youngsters, all but little Skeezucks, fell asleep, and were tucked into bed. Even the pup was exhausted. Field and the blacksmith, Lufkins, Bone, Keno, and the others thought eagerly of the morrow, which would come so soon, and go so swiftly, and leave them with no little trio of girls romping with their finally joyous bit of a boy.

When at length they were ready to say good-night to tiny Carson, he was sitting again on the knee of the gray old miner. To every one he gave a sweet little smile, as they took his soft, baby hand for a shake.

And when they were gone, and sleep was coming to hover him softly in her wings, he held out both his little arms in a gesture of longing that seemed to embrace the three red caps and all this happier world he began to understand.

"Somebody—wants 'ittle—Nu-thans," he sighed, and his tiny mouth was smiling when his eyes had closed.



WHEN THE PARSON DEPARTED

IN the morning the preacher rolled up his sleeves and assisted Jim in preparing breakfast in the cabin on the hill, where he and Doc, in addition to Keno and the miner, had spent the night. Doc had departed at an early hour to take his morning meal at home. Keno was out in the brush securing additional fuel, the supply of which was low.

"Jim," said Stowe, in the easy way so quickly adopted in the mines, "how does the camp happen to have this one little child? There seem to be no families, and that I can understand, for Bullionville is much the same; but where did you get the pretty little boy?"

"I found him out in the brush, way over

to Coyote Valley," Jim replied. "He was painted up to look like a little Piute, and the Injuns must have lost him when they went through the valley hunting rabbits."

"Found him—out in the brush?" repeated the preacher. "Was he all alone?"

"Not quite. He had several dead rabbits for company," Jim drawled in reply, and he told all that was known, and all that the camp had conjectured, concerning the finding of the grave little chap, and his brief and none too happy sojourn in Borealis.

The preacher listened with sympathetic attention.

"Poor little fellow," he said, at the end. "It someway makes me think of a thing that occurred near Bullionville. I was called to Giant-Powder Gulch to give a man a decent burial. He had been on a three-days' spree, and then had lain all night in the wet where the horse-trough overflowed, and he died of quick pneumonia. Well, a man there told me the fellow was a stranger to the Gulch. He said the dissolute creature had appeared, on the first occasion, with a very

small child, a little boy, who he said had belonged to his sister, who was dead. My informant said that just as soon as the fellow could learn the location of a near-by Indian camp he had carried the little boy away. The man who told me of it never heard of the child again, and, in fact, had not been aware of the drunkard's return to the Gulch, till he heard the man had died, in the rear of a highly notorious saloon. I wonder if it's possible this quiet little chap is the same little boy."

"It don't seem possible a livin' man—a white man—could have done a thing like that," said Jim.

"No—it doesn't," Stowe agreed.

"And yet, it must have been in some such way little Skeezucks came to be among the Injuns," Jim reflected, aloud. Then in a moment he added: "I'm glad you told me, parson. I know now the low-down brute that sent him off with the Piute hunters can't never come to Borealis and take him away."

And yet, all through their homely breakfast old Jim was silently thinking. A newer

tenderness for the innocent, deserted little pilgrim was welling in his heart.

Keno, having declared his intention of shovelling off the snow and opening up a trench to uncover the gold-ledge of the miner's claim, departed briskly when the meal was presently finished. Jim and the preacher, with the pup, however, went at once to the home of Miss Dennihan, where the children were all thus early engaged in starting off the day of romping and fun.

The lunch that came along at noon, and the dinner that the happy Miss Doc prepared at dusk, were mere interruptions in the play of the tiny Carson and the lively little girls.

There never has been, and there never can be, a measure of childish happiness, but surely never was a child in the world more happy than the quaint little waif who had sat all alone that bright November afternoon in the brush where the Indian pony had dropped him. All the games they had tried on the previous day were repeated anew by the youngsters, and many freshly invented were enjoyed, including a romp in the snow, with

the sled that one of the miners had fashioned for the Christmas-tree.

That evening a larger contingent of the men who hungered for the atmosphere of home came early to the little house and joined in the games. Laughter made them all one human family, and songs were sung that took them back to farms and clearings and villages, far away in the Eastern States, where sweethearts, mothers, wives, and sisters ofttimes waited and waited for news of a wanderer, lured far away by the glint of silver and gold. The notes of birds, the chatter of brooks, the tinkle of cow-bells came again, with the dreams of a barefoot boy.

Something of calm and a newer hope and fresher resolution was vouchsafed to them all when the wholesome young preacher held a homely service, in response to their earnest request.

"Life is a mining for gold," said he, "and every human breast is a mother-lode of the precious metal—if only some one can find the out-croppings, locate a claim, and come

upon the ledge. There are toils, privations, and sufferings, which the search for gold brings forever in its train. There are pains and miseries and woe in the search for the gold in men, but, boys, it's a glorious life! There is something so honest, so splendid, in taking the metal from the earth! No one is injured, every one is helped. And when the gold in a man is found, think what a gift it is to the world and to God! I am a miner myself, but I make no gold. It is there, in the hill, or in the man, where God has put it away, and all that you and I can do is to work, though our hands be blistered and our hearts be sore, until we come upon the treasure at the last. We hasten here, and we scramble there, wheresoever the glint seems brightest, the field most promising; but the gold I seek is everywhere, and, boys, there is gold on gold in Borealis!

"In the depth of the tunnel or the shaft you need a candle, throwing out its welcome rays, to show you how to work the best and where to dig, as you follow the lead. In the search for gold the way is very often dark,

so we'll sing a hymn that I think you will like, and then we'll conclude with a prayer.

"Children—girls—we will all start it off together, you and your mother and me."

The three little, bright-faced girls, the pretty mother, and the father of the little flock stood there together to sing. They sang the hymn old Jim had attempted to recall at his own little service that Sunday, weeks before:

"Lead, Kindly Light, amid the encircling gloom,
Lead Thou me on.
The night is dark and I am far from home.
Lead Thou me on.
Keep Thou my feet; I do not ask to see
The distant scene; one step enough for me."

The fresh, sweet voices of the three little girls sent a thrill of pleasure through the hearts of the big, rough men, and the lumps arose in their throats. One after another they joined in the singing, those who knew no words as well as those who were quick to catch a line or more.

Then at last the preacher held up his hand in his earnest supplication.

"Father," he said, in his simple way, "we are only a few of Thy children, here in the hollow of Thy mountains, but we wish to share in the beauty of Thy smile. We want to hear the comfort of Thy voice. Away out here in the sage-brush we pray that Thou wilt find us and take us home to Thy heart and love. Father, when Thou sendest Thy blessing for this little child, send enough for all the boys. Amen."

And so the evening ended, and the night moved in majesty across the mountains.

In the morning, soon after breakfasts were eaten, and Jim and the preacher had come again to the home of the Dennihans, Webber, the blacksmith, and Lufkins, the teamster, presently arrived with the horses and carriage.

A large group of men swiftly gathered to bid good-bye to the children, the shy little mother, and the fine young preacher.

"I'm sorry to go," he told them, honestly. "I like your little camp."

"It's goin' to be a rousin' town pretty soon, by jinks!" said Keno, pulling at his

sleeves. "I'm showin' up a great big ledge on Jim's Baberlonian claim."

"Mebbe you'll some day come back here, parson," said the smith.

"Perhaps I shall," he answered. Then a faint look of worry came on his face as he thrust his hand in his pocket. "Before I forget it, you must let me know what my bill is for board of the horses and also for the work you've done."

Webber flushed crimson.

"There ain't no bill," he said. "What do you take us fellers fer—since little Skeezucks came to camp? All we want is to shake hands all 'round, with you and the missus and the little girls."

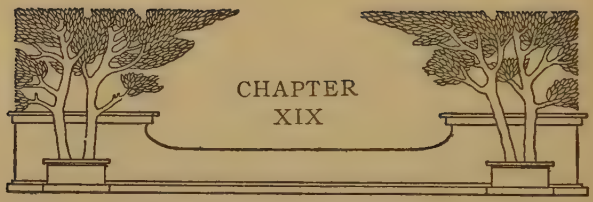
Old Jim, little Skeezucks, the pup, and Miss Doc, with Mrs. Stowe, came out through the snow to the road in front of the gate. Not a penny had the preacher been able to force upon the Dennihans for their lodging and care.

The man tried to speak—to thank them all, but he failed. He shook hands "all around," however, and then his shy little

wife and the three little girls did the same. Preacher and all, they kissed tiny Carson, sitting on the arm he knew so well, and holding fast to his doll; and he placed his wee bit of a hand on the face of each of his bright-faced little friends. He understood almost nothing of what it meant to have his visitors clamber into the carriage, nevertheless a grave little query came into his eyes.

"Well, Jim, good-bye again," said Stowe, and he shook the old miner's hand a final time. "Good-bye, Miss Dennihan — good-bye, boys."

With all the little youngsters in their bright red caps waving their mittened hands and calling out good-bye, the awkward men, Miss Doc, old Jim, and tiny Skeezucks saw them drive away. Till they came to the bend of the road the children continued to wave, and then the great ravine received them as if to the arms of the mountains.



OLD JIM'S RESOLUTION

ALL that day little Skeezucks and the pup were waiting, listening, expecting the door to open and the three small girls to reappear. They went to the window time after time and searched the landscape of mountains and snow, Tintoretto standing on his hind-legs for the purpose, and emitting little sounds of puppy-wise worry at the long delay of their three little friends.

A number of the men of the camp came to visit there again that evening.

"We thought little Skeezucks might be lonesome," they explained.

So often as the door was opened, the pup and the grave little pilgrim—clothed these days in the little white frock Miss Dennihan

had made—looked up, ever in the hope of espying again those three red caps. The men saw the wistfulness increase in the baby's face.

"We've got to keep him amused," said Field.

The awkward fellows, therefore, began the games, and romped about, and rode the lonely little foundling in the wagon, to the great delight of poor Miss Doc, who felt, as much as the pup or Skeezucks, the singular emptiness of her house.

Having learned to laugh, little Carson tried to repeat the delights of a mirthful emotion. The faint baby smile that resulted made the men all quiet and sober.

"He's tired, that's what the matter," the blacksmith explained. "We'd better be goin', boys, and come to see him to-morrow."

"Of course he must be tired," agreed the teamster.

But Jim, sitting silently watching, and the fond Miss Doc, whom nothing concerning the child escaped, knew better. It was not, how-

ever, till the boys were gone and silence had settled on the house that even Jim was made aware of the all that the tiny mite of a man was undergoing. Miss Doc had gone to the kitchen. Jim, Tintoretto, and little Skeezucks were alone. The little fellow and the pup were standing in the centre of the floor, intently listening. Together they went to the door. There little Carson stretched his tiny arms across the panels in baby appeal.

"Bruv-ver — Jim," he begged. "Bruv-ver—Jim."

Then, at last, the gray old miner understood the whole significance of the baby words. "Bruvver Jim" meant more than just himself; it meant the three little girls—associates—children—all that is dear to a childish heart—all that is indispensable to baby happiness—all that a lonely little heart must have or starve.

Jim groaned, for the utmost he could do was done when he took the sobbing little fellow in his arms and murmured him words of comfort as he carried him up and down the room.

The day that followed, and the day after that, served only to deepen the longing in the childish breast. The worried men of Borealis played on the floor in desperation. They fashioned new wagons, sleds, and dolls; they exhausted every device their natures prompted; but beyond a sad little smile and the call for "Bruvver Jim" they received no answer from the baby heart.

At the end of a week the little fellow smiled no more, not even in his faint, sweet way of yearning. His heart was starving; his grave, baby thought was far away, with the small red caps and the laughing voices of children.

The fond Miss Doc and the gray old Jim alone knew what the end must be, inevitably, unless some change should speedily come to pass.

Meantime, Keno had quietly opened up a mighty ledge of gold-bearing ore on the hill. It lay between walls of slate and granite. Its hugeness was assured. That the camp would boom in the spring was foreordained. And that ledge all belonged to Jim. But

he heard them excitedly tell what the find would do for him and the camp as one in a dream. He could not care while his tiny waif was starving in his lonely little way.

"Boys," he said at last, one night, when the smith and Bone had called to see the tiny man, who had sadly gone to sleep—"boys, he's pinin'. He's goin' to die if he don't have little kids for company. I've made up my mind. I'm goin' to take him to Fremont right away."

Miss Doc, who was knitting a tiny pair of mittens and planning a tiny red cap and woollen leggings, dropped a stitch and lost a shade of color from her face.

"Ain't there no other way?" inquired the blacksmith, a poignant regret already at his heart. "You don't really think he'd up and die?"

"Children have got to be happy," Jim replied. "If they don't get their fun when they're little, why, when is it ever goin' to come? I know he'll die, all alone with us old cusses, and I ain't a-goin' to wait."

"But the claim is goin' to be a fortune,"

said Bone. "Couldn't you hold on jest a week or two and see if he won't get over thinkin' 'bout the little gals?"

"If I kept him here and he died, like that —just pinin' away for other little kids—I couldn't look fortune in the face," answered Jim, to which, in a moment, he added, slowly, "Boys, he's more to me than all the claims in Nevada."

"But—you'll bring him back in the spring, of course?" said the blacksmith, with a worried look about his eyes. "We'd miss him, Jim, almost as much as you."

"By that time," supplemented Bone, "the camp's agoin' to be boomin'. Probably we'll have lots of wimmen and kids and schools and everything, fer the gold up yonder is goin' to make Borealis some consid'rable shakes."

"I'll bring him back in the spring, all right," said the miner; "but none of you boys would want to see me keep him here and have him die."

Miss Doc had been a silent listener to all their conversation. She was knitting again, with doubled speed.

"Jim, how you goin'?" she now inquired.

"I want to get a horse," answered Jim. "We could ride there horseback quicker than any other way. If only I can get the horse."

"It may be stormin' in the mornin'," Webber suggested. "A few clouds is comin' up from the West. What about the horse, Jim, if it starts to snow?"

"Riding in a saddle, I can git through," said the miner. "If it snows at all, it won't storm bad. Storms that come up sudden never last very long, and it's been good and bright all day. I'll start unless it's snowin' feather-beds."

Miss Doc had been feeling, since the subject first was broached, that something in her heart would snap. But she worked on, her emotions, yearnings, and fears all rigorously knitted into the tiny mittens.

"You'll let me wrap him up real warm?" she said.

Jim knew her thoughts were all on little Skeezucks.

"If you didn't do it, who would?" he ask-

ed, in a kindness of heart that set her pulse to faster beating.

"But—s'pose you don't git any job in Fremont," Bone inquired. "Will you let us know?"

"I'll git it, don't you fear," said Jim. "I know there ain't no one so blind as the feller who's always lookin' for a job, but the little kid has fetched me a sort of second sight."

"Well, if anything was goin' hard, we'd like for to know," insisted Bone. "I guess we'd better start along, though, now, if we're goin' to scare up a bronch to-night."

He and the blacksmith departed. Jim and the lorn Miss Doc sat silently together in the warm little house. Jim looked at her quietly, and saw many phases of womanly beauty in her homely face.

"Wal," he drawled, at last, "I'll go up home, on the hill." He hesitated for a moment, and then added, quietly, "Miss Doc, you've been awful kind to the little boy—and me."

"It wasn't nuthin'," she said.

They stood there together, beside the table.

"Yes, it was," said Jim, "and it's set me to thinkin' a heap." He was silent for a moment, as before, and then, somewhat shyly for him, he said, "When we come back home here, in the spring, Miss Doc, I'm thinkin' the little feller ought to have a mother. Do you think you could put up with him—and with me?"

"Jim," she said, in a voice that shook with emotion, "do you think I'm a kind enough woman?"

"Too kind — for such as me," said Jim, thickly. He took her hand in his own, and with something of a courtliness and grace, reminiscent of his youth, he raised it to his lips. "Good-night," he said. "Good-night, Miss Doc."

"Good-night, Jim," she answered, and he saw in her eyes the beauty that God in his wisdom gives alone to mother-kind.

And when he had gone she sat there long, forgetting to keep up the fire, forgetting that Doc himself would come home early in the morning from his night-employment, forgetting everything personal save the words old

Jim had spoken, as she knitted and knitted, to finish that tiny pair of mittens.

The night was spent, and her heart was at once glad and sore when, at last, she concluded her labor of love. Nevertheless, in the morning she was up in time to prepare a luncheon for Jim to take along, and to delve in her trunk for precious wraps and woollens in which to bundle the grave little pilgrim, long before old Jim or the horse he would ride had appeared before the house.

Little Skeezucks was early awake and dressed. A score of times Miss Doc caught him up in her hungering arms, to hold him in fervor to her heart and to kiss his baby cheek. If she cried a little, she made it sound and look like laughter to the child. He patted her face with his tiny hand, even as he begged for "Bruvver Jim."

"You're goin' to find Bruvver Jim," she said. "You're goin' away from fussy old me to where you'll be right happy."

At least a dozen men of the camp came plodding along behind the horse, that arrived

at the same time Jim, the pup, and Keno appeared at the Dennihan home.

Doc Dennihan had cut off his customary period of rest and sleep, to say good-bye, with the others, to the pilgrims about to depart.

Jim was dressed about as usual for the ride, save that he wore an extra pair of trousers beneath his overalls and a great blanket-coat upon his back. He was hardy, and he looked it, big as he was and solidly planted in his wrinkled boots.

The sky, despite Webber's predictions of a storm, was practically free from clouds, but a breeze was sweeping through the gorge with increasing strength. It was cold, and the men who stood about in groups kept their hands in their pockets and their feet on the move for the sake of the slight degree of warmth thereby afforded.

As their spokesman, Webber, the blacksmith, took the miner aside.

"Jim," said he, producing a buckskin bag, which he dropped in the miner's pocket, "the boys can't do nuthin' fer little Skeezucks when he's 'way off up to Fremont, so

they've chipped in a little and wanted you to have it in case of need."

"But, Webber—" started Jim.

"Ain't no buts," interrupted the smith. "You'll hurt their feelin's if you go to buttin' and gittin' ornary."

Wherefore the heavy little bag of coins remained where Webber had placed it.

There were sober words of caution and advice, modest requests for a line now and then, and many an evidence of the hold old Jim had secured on their hearts before the miner finally received the grave and carefully bundled little Carson from the arms of Miss Doc and came to the gate to mount his horse and ride away.

"Jest buckle this strap around me and the little boy," instructed Jim, as he gave a wide leather belt to the teamster; "then if I happen for to need both hands, he won't be able to git a fall."

The strap was adjusted about the two in the manner suggested.

"Good scheme," commented Field, and the others agreed that it was.

Then all the rough and awkward big fellows soberly shook the pretty little pilgrim's hand in its mitten, and said good-bye to the tiny chap, who was clinging, as always, to his doll.

"What you goin' to do with Tinterretter?" inquired the teamster as he looked at the pup, while Jim, with an active swing, mounted to the saddle.

"Take him along," said Jim. "I'll put him in the sack I've got, and tie him on behind the saddle when he gits too much of runnin' on foot. He wouldn't like it to be left behind and Skeezucks gone."

"Guess that's kerrect," agreed the teamster. "He's a bully pup, you bet."

Poor Miss Doc remained inside the gate. Her one mad impulse was to run to Jim, clasp him and the grave little waif in her arms, and beg to be taken on the horse. But repression had long been her habit of life. She smiled, and did not even speak, though the eyes of the fond little pilgrim were turned upon her in baby affection.

"Well—you'll git there all right," said the

blacksmith, voicing the hope that swelled in his heart. "So long, and let us know how the little feller makes it with the children."

"By jinks!—so long," said Keno, striving tremendously to keep down his rising emotions. "So long. I'll stay by the claim."

"And give our love to them three little gals," said Bone. "So long."

One after another they wrung the big, rough hand, and said "So long" in their easy way.

"'Bye, Miss Doc," said Jim, at the last. "Skeezucks—say good-bye—to Miss Doc—and all the boys. Say good-bye."

The little fellow had heard "good-bye" when the three little caps of red departed. It came as a word that hurt his tiny heart. But, obediently, he looked about at all his friends.

"Dood-bye," he said, in baby accents. "Dood-bye."

IN THE TOILS OF THE BLIZZARD

SOMETHING was tugged and wrenched mighty hard as Jim rode finally around the hill, and so out of sight of the meagre little camp he called his home, but resolution was strong within him. Up and up through the narrow cañon, winding tortuously towards the summit, like the trail of a most prodigious serpent channelled in the snow, the horse slowly climbed, with Tintoretto, the joyous, busily visiting each and every portion of the road, behind, before, and at the sides.

What a world of white it was! The wind had increased, and a few scattered specks of snow that sped before it seemed trying to muster the force of a storm, from the sky in which the sun was still shining, between huge

rents and spaces that separated scudding clouds.

It was not, however, until an hour had gone that the flakes began to swirl in fitful flurries. By then the travellers were making better time, and Jim was convinced the blotted sun would soon again assert its mastery over clouds so abruptly accumulated in the sky. The wind, however, had veered about. It came directly in their faces, causing the horse to lower his head and the pup to sniff in displeasure.

Little Skeezucks, with his back to the slanting fire of small, hard flakes, nestled in comfort on the big, protecting shoulder, where he felt secure against all manner of attack.

For two more hours they rode ahead, while the snow came down somewhat thicker.

"It can't last," old Jim said, cheerily, to the child and horse and pup. "Just a blow-out. Too fierce and sudden to hold."

Yet, when they came to the great level valley beyond the second range of hills, the biting gale appeared to greet them with a

fury pent up for the purpose. Unobstructed it swept across the desert of snow, flinging not only the shotlike particles from the sky, but also the loose, roving drift, as dry as salt, that lay four inches deep upon the solider snow that floored the plain. And such miles and miles of the frozen waste were there! The distant mountains looked like huge windrows of snow wearing away in the rush of the gale.

Confident still it was only a flurry, Jim rode on. The pup by now was trailing behind, his tail less high, his fuzzy coat beginning to fill with snow, his eyes so pelted that he sneezed to keep them clear.

The air was cold and piercing as it drove upon them. Jim felt his feet begin to ache in his hard, leather boots. Beneath his clothing the chill lay thinly against his body, save for the place where little Carson was strapped to his breast.

"It can't last," the man insisted. "Never yet saw a blusterin' storm that didn't blow itself to nothin' in a hurry."

But a darkness was flung about them with

the thicker snow that flew. Indeed, the flakes were multiplying tremendously. The wind was becoming a hurricane. With a roar it rushed across the valley. The world of storm suddenly closed in upon them and narrowed down the visible circle of desolation. Like hurrying troops of incalculable units, the dots of frozen stuff went sweeping past in a blinding swarm.

The thing had become a blizzard. Jim halted his horse, convinced that wisdom prompted them to turn their backs upon the fury and flee again to Borealis, to await a calmer day for travelling. A fiercer buffeting of wind puffed from the west, fiercely toothed with shot of snow. As if in fear unnamable, a gaunt coyote suddenly appeared scurrying onward before the hail and snow, and was quickly gone.

The horse shied violently out of the road. The girth of the saddle was loosened. With a superhuman effort old Jim remained in his seat, but he knew he must tighten the cinch.

Dismounting, he permitted the horse to face away from the gale. The pup came

gladly to the shelter of the miner's boots and clambered stiffly up on his leg, for a word of companionship and comfort.

"All right," said Jim, giving him a pat on the head when the saddle was once more secure in its place; "but I reckon we'll turn back homeward, and I'll walk myself, for a spell, to warm me up. It may let up, and if it does we can head for Fremont again without much loss of time."

With the bridle-rein over his shoulder, he led the horse back the way they had come, his own head low on his breast, to avoid the particles of snow that searched him out persistently.

They had not plodded homeward far when the miner presently discovered they were floundering about in snow-covered brush. He quickly lifted his head to look about. He could see for a distance of less than twenty feet in any direction. Mountains, plain—the world of white—had disappeared in the blinding onrush of snow and wind. A chaos of driving particles comprised the universe. And by the token of the brush underfoot

they had wandered from the road. There had been no attempt on the miner's part to follow any tracks they had left on their westward course, for the gale and drift had obliterated every sign, almost as soon as the horse's hoofs had ploughed them in the snow.

Believing that the narrow road across the desolation of the valley lay to the right, he forged ahead in that direction. Soon they came upon smoother walking, which he thought was an indication that the road they sought was underfoot. It was not. He plodded onward for fifteen minutes, however, before he knew he had made a mistake.

The storm was, if possible, more furious. The snow flew thicker; it stung more sharply, and seemed to come from every direction.

"We'll stand right here behind the horse till it quits," he said. "It can't keep up a lick like this."

But turning about, in an effort to face the animal away from the worst of the blizzard, he kicked a clump of sage brush arched fairly over by its burden of snow. Instantly a startled rabbit leaped from beneath the

shrub and bounded against the horse's legs, and then away in the storm. In affright the horse jerked madly backward. The bridle was broken. It held for a second, then tore away from the animal's head and fell in a heap in the snow.

"Whoa, boy!—whoa!" said the miner, in a quiet way, but the horse, in his terror, snorted at the brush and galloped away, to be lost from sight on the instant.

For a moment the miner, with his bundled little burden in his arms, started in pursuit of the bronco. But even the animal's tracks in the snow were being already effaced by the sweep of the powdery gale. The utter futility of searching for anything was harshly thrust upon the miner's senses.

They were lost in that valley of snow, cold, and blizzard.

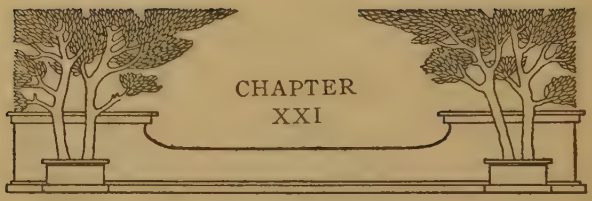
"We'll have to make a shelter the best we can," he said, "and wait here, maybe half an hour, till the storm has quit."

He kicked the snow from a cluster of sagebrush shrubs, and behind this flimsy barrier presently crouched, with the shivering

pup, and with the silent little foundling in his arms.

What hours that merciless blizzard raged, no annals of Nevada tell. What struggles the gray old miner made to find his way homeward before its wrath, what a fight it was he waged against the elements till night came on and the worst of the storm had ceased, could never be known in Borealis.

But early that night the teamster, Lufkins, was startled by the neighing of a horse, and when he came to the stable, there was the half-blinded animal on which old Jim and tiny Skeezucks had ridden away in the morning—the empty saddle still upon his back.



A BED IN THE SNOW

THE great stout ore-wagons stood in the snow that lay on the Borealis street, with never a horse or a mule to keep them company. Not an animal fit to bear a man had been left in the camp. But the twenty men who rode far off in the white desolation out beyond were losing hope as they searched and searched in the drifts and mounds that lay so deep upon the earth.

By feeble lantern glows at first, and later by the cold, gray light of dawn, they scanned the road and the country for miles and miles. It was five o'clock, and six in the morning, and still the scattered company of men and horses pushed onward through the snow.

The quest became one of dread. They almost feared to find the little group. The

wind had ceased to blow, but the air was cold. Gray ribbons of cloud were stretched across the sky. Desolation was everywhere —in the heavens, on the plain, on the distant mountains. All the world was snow, dotted only where the mounted men made insignificant spots against the waste of white.

Aching with the cold, aching more in their hearts, the men from Borealis knew a hundred ways to fear the worst.

Then at last a shout, and a shot from a pistol, sped to the farthest limits of the line of searching riders and prodded every drop of sluggish blood within them to a swift activity.

The shout and signal had come from Webber, the blacksmith, riding a big, bay mare. Instantly Field, Bone, and Lufkins galloped to where he was swinging out of his saddle.

There in the snow, where at last he had floundered down after making an effort truly heroic to return to Borealis, lay the gray old Jim, with tiny Skeezucks strapped to his breast and hovered by his motionless arms. In his hands the little mite of a pil-

grim held his furry doll. On the snow lay the luncheon Miss Doc had so lovingly prepared. And Tintoretto, the pup, whom nature had made to be joyous and glad, was prostrate at the miner's feet, with flakes of white all blown through the hair of his coat. A narrow little track around the two he loved so well was beaten in the snow, where time after time the worried little animal had circled and circled about the silent forms, in some brave, puppy-wise service of watching and guarding, faithfully maintained till he could move no more.

For a moment after Bone and Lufkins joined him at the spot, the blacksmith stood looking at the half-buried three. The whole tale of struggle with the chill, of toiling onward through the heavy snow, of falling over hidden shrubs, of battling for their lives, was somehow revealed to the silent men by the haggard, death-white face of Jim.

"They can't—be dead," said the smith, in a broken voice. "He—couldn't, and—us all—his friends."

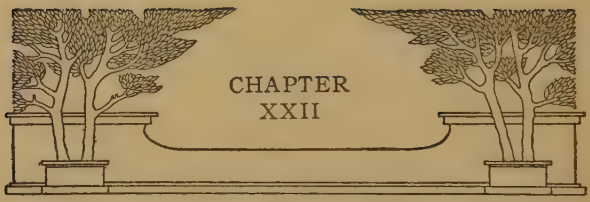
But when he knelt and pushed away some

of the snow, the others thought his heart had lost all hope.

It was Field, however, who thought to feel for a pulse. The eager searchers from farther away had come to the place. A dozen pair of eyes or more were focussed on the man as he held his breath and felt for a sign of life.

"Alive!—He's alive!" he cried, excitedly. "And little Skeezucks, too! For God's sake, boys, let's get them back to camp!"

In a leap of gladness the men let out a mighty cheer. From every saddle a rolled-up blanket was swiftly cut, and rough but tender hands swept off the snow that clung to the forms of the miner, the child, and the pup.



CLEANING THEIR SLATE

NEVER could castle or mansion contain more of gladness and joy of the heart than was crowded into the modest little home of Miss Doc when at last the prayers and ministrations of a score of men and the one "decent" woman of the camp were rewarded by the Father all-pitiful.

"I'm goin' to bawl, and I'll lick any feller that calls me a baby!" said the blacksmith, but he laughed and "bawled" together.

They had saved them all, but a mighty quiet Jim and a quieter little Skeezucks and a wholly subdued little pup lay helpless still in the care of the awkward squad of nurses.

And then a council of citizens got together at the dingy shop of Webber for a talk.

"We mustn't fergit," said the smith, "that

Jim was a takin' the poor little feller to Fremont 'cause he thought he was pinin' away fer children's company; and I guess Jim knowed. Now, the question is, what we goin' for to do? Little Skeezucks ain't a goin' to be no livelier unless he gits that company—and maybe he'll up and die of loneliness, after all. Do you fellers think we'd ought to git up a party and take 'em all to Fremont, as soon as they're able to stand the trip?"

Bone, the bar-keep answered: "What's the matter with gittin' the preacher and his wife and three little gals to come back here and settle in Borealis? I'm goin' in for minin', after a while, myself, and I'll—and I'll give my saloon from eight to two on Sundays to be fixed all up fer a church; and I reckon we kin support Parson Stowe as slick as any town in all Navady."

For a moment this astonishing speech was followed by absolute silence. Then, as if with one accord, the men all cheered in admiration.

"Let's git the parson back right off,"

cried the carpenter. "I kin build the finest steeple ever was!"

"Send a gang to fetch him here to-day!" said Webber.

"I wouldn't lose no time, or he may git stuck on Fremont, and never want to budge," added Lufkins.

Field and half a dozen more concurred.

"I'll be one to go myself," said the blacksmith, promptly. "Two or three others can come along, and we'll git him if we have to steal him—wife, little gals, and all!"

But the party was yet unformed for the trip when the news of the council's intentions was spread throughout the camp, and an ugly feature of the life in the mines was revealed.

The gambler, Parky, sufficiently recovered from the wound in his arm to be out of his house, and planning a secret revenge against old Jim and his friends, was more than merely opposed to the plan which had come from the shop of Webber.

"It don't go down," said he to a crowd, with a sneer at the parson and with oaths

for Bone. "I own some Borealis property myself, and don't you fergit I'll make things too hot for any preacher to settle in the camp. And I 'ain't yet finished with the gang that thought they was smart on New-Year's eve—just chew that up with your cud of tobacker!"

With half a dozen ruffians at his back—the scum of prisons, gambling-dens, and low resorts—he summed up a menace not to be estimated lightly. Many citizens feared to incur his wrath; many were weak, and therefore as likely to gather to his side as not, under the pressure he could put upon them.

The camp was suddenly ripe for a struggle. Right and decency, or lawlessness and violence would speedily conquer. There could be no half-way measures. If Webber and his following had been persuaded before that Parson Stowe should have a place in the town, they were grimly determined on the project now.

The blacksmith it was who strung up once again a bar of steel before his shop and rang it with his hammer.

There were forty men who answered to the summons. And when they had finished the council of war within the shop, the work of an upward lift had been accomplished. A supplement was added to the work of signing a short petition requesting Parson Stowe to come among them, and this latter took the form of a mandate addressed to the gambler and his backing of outlaws, thieves, and roughs. It was brief, but the weight of its words was mighty.

"The space you're using in Borealis is wanted for decenter purposes," it read. "We give you twenty-four hours to clear out. Git!—and then God have mercy on your souls if any one of the gang is found in Borealis!"

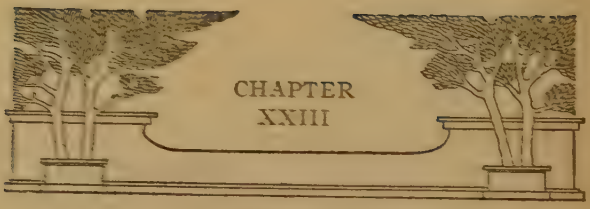
This was all there was, except for a fearful drawing of a coffin and a skull. And such an array of inky names, scrawled with obvious pains and distinctness, was on the paper that argument itself was plainly hand in hand with a noose of rope.

Opposition to an army of forty wrathful and determined men would have been but

suicide. Parky nodded when he read the note. He knew the game was closed. He sold all his interests in the camp for what they would bring and bought a pair of horses and a carriage.

In groups and pairs his henchmen—suddenly thrown over by their leader to hustle for themselves—sneaked away from the town, many of them leaving immediately in their dread of the grim reign of law now come upon the camp. Parky, for his part, waited in some deliberation, and then drove away with a sneer upon his lips when at last his time was growing uncomfortably short.

Decency had won—the moral slate of the camp was clean!



A DAY OF JOY

THERE came a day—never to be forgotten in the annals of Borealis—when, to the ringing of the bar of steel, Parson Stowe, with his pretty little wife and the three little red-capped youngsters, rode once more into town to make their home with their big, rough friends.

Fifty awkward men of the mines roared lustily with cheering. Fifty great voices then combined in a sweet, old song that rang through the snow-clad hills:

"Lead, Kindly Light, amid the encircling gloom,
Lead Thou me on.
The night is dark, and I am far from home,
Lead Thou me on."

And the first official acts of the wholesome young parson were conducted in the

"church" that Bone had given to the town when the happy little Skeezucks was christened "Carson Boone" and the drawling old Jim and the fond Miss Doc were united as man and wife.

"If only I'd known what a heart she's got, I'd asked her before," the miner drawled. "But, boys, it's never too late to pray for sense."

The moment of it all, however, which the men would remember till the final call of the trumpet was that in which the three little girls, in their bright-red caps, came in at the door of the Dennihan home. They would never forget the look on the face of their motherless, quaint little waif as he held forth both his tiny arms to the vision and cried out:

"Bruvver Jim!"

THE END